

**A New Collection of Modern Fantasy
Stories by Today's Best Writers**

STRANGE FANTASY

SPRING 1970 • No. 11 • STILL 50c

JUDITH MERRIL • LARRY HARRIS

J. G. BALLARD • EDWARD WELLEN

ROG PHILLIPS • BARRY P. MILLER

WILTON G. BEGGS • J. T. McINTOSH

THEODORE L. THOMAS • R. F. YOUNG



Frobisher had a reputation as a suicide planet. But the mutineers never really knew what metamorphoses took place beneath the barrier layers.

See PLANET OF CHANGE



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the SHRINE of TEMPTATION

By JUDITH MERRIL

Illustrator DOMERI

The ritual went on as always—until Lallayall embraced the sinuous figure of the Lifegiver, and the secret of the Rebirth was acted out before horrified eyes.

THE name his own people called him was Lallayall. That was, of course, just his calling-name, and because it meant almost the same thing to us, we called him Lucky.

This was no transgression of courtesy, or culture-arrogance on our part. His true name, after the fashion of his people, was already long, and growing, a descriptive catalogue useful only for records and ritual occasions. A calling-name may be anything derived from the whole, so long as it suits, and the called one will answer it. Lucky was delighted to have a new nickname from us, in our language.

He was, when we came to the island, just eight years old—as we reckon. His people count dif-

ferently; to them, he was half-way through his Third Decade; in five more seasons, he would undergo the Apprenticeship Rites that would end his First Age. Either way, he was just past the midpoint between babyhood and puberty. Like most of his race—and all others but us on the island—he was brown-skinned and dark-eyed, black haired. Like most of his age, he was eager, questioning, rational, mystical, obedient, rebellious, clumsy and courteous, graceful and quick; like too few of them, he was generally happy and always healthy, serenely certain of parental love, highly intelligent and well-informed.

Certain of these things, and all of them to a degree, were the

product of Shrine island culture. Lucky lived in a world he accepted as having been designed primarily for his own benefit and, largely, it had. Among the Island children, there were no fears, hungers, troubles or questions that could not be voiced, and none—within the limits of the island's capacity—that would not be answered to the best extent of the child's understanding. All children were swift and bright; but among them, Lucky was especially blessed. Thus, his name.

HE WAS the first in his age group to find his apprenticeship. When we came, he already knew what he wanted. Until a short time before that, he had spent his days, like the others, wandering from hunters to planners to makers to teachers to planters to singers, spreading his wonders and askings impartially. The others still wandered, multiply curious, questioning weavers and fishers and carpenters, healers and painters and crafters of food. It would be three or four seasons before, one by one, they singled out the preferred occupations to which they'd be bound in training at First Rites.

But Lucky already knew what he wanted. Before we came, he went, day after day, to the Shrine or the House of Shrine-

men, squatting patiently in the courtyard, waiting for the chance to carry sand (for stone scrubbing) or water or polishing cloths or firewood for a Shrine-man, listening in silence to such talk as was carried on in his presence, storing up questions to ask them, *hallall*, when the time should be ripe. Part of each day he sat at the feet of the Figures, self-hypnotized by gleaming amber and blue, spinning out glorious fantasies of the Rebirth.

(His own fascination with the Shrine and Shrinemen, and the weight of mystery he gave to some words and phrases—which I have tried to translate with capitals and occasional sonorous phrases in this account—led us later to a misunderstanding of some proportion. But, *hallall* . . .)

His persistence was already recognized in the village. The other children first, then his mothers and fathers, had noticed his absence from forest, fields, and shops. Then the Shrinemen began teasing him with familiar fondness at evening gatherings and restday games, so that everyone started to realize what he had chosen. And if it was something of a shock to parents and teachers, the boy did not know it.

Perhaps because we settled as close to the Shrine as we dared (just over the edge of a hill with a clear view of the courtyard be-

tween the shrine and the House of Shrinemen), perhaps out of the same fascination with the unknown that had drawn him to the Shrine—Lucky was our first and most frequent visitor, and became, either in his own person or as interpreter, our chief source of information about both the Shrine and the islanders. He did not, at first, realize that our preoccupation with the Shrine was as great as his own; we did not share his confident artlessness in questioning-asking. I do not know just how he explained us to himself at first, or whether he even tried to. Perhaps he just waited to learn what he wanted to know—*hallall*.

IT WAS not passive waiting, anyhow. The first day, after his first attempt to speak with us, he sat in what must have been stunned bemusement for several hours, pondering the incredible fact of a second language. (We saw the squatting inward-turned boy as “a stolid impassive indigene.” I blush to admit that the phrase is from my own notebook.) Then, having fully accepted that the phenomenon was not—obviously—impossible, but only previously unknown, it was he who approached us with the second overture.

We were just setting up the hand bellows for blowing foam into the camp wallforms. Lucky

walked over, watched, walked away, and came back with a round stone, flattened on one side, just right to prop up the foot that kept slipping.

He held it out. We all stopped and stared. George Lazslo was quickest. He reached out and took the stone, smiling.

“Thank you,” George said.

The boy touched the stone. “Sannacue?” His small brown face seemed to turn gold with the joy of his smile. “Mertz,” he said, tapping the stone. “Mertz—sannacue?”

Henry started to correct him, but Jenny and I both realized at the same time that it was better to let the error ride, and not confuse the issue. (Starting as a joke, we all got to where we found *sannacue* as natural a word as *stone*.)

The principle was established, and it was astonishing to us how rapidly he learned. Jenny was our linguist, and predictably proved quicker than the rest of us in learning the island language, but when they sat exchanging names and phrases, it was she, far more often than he, who had to be told twice. Once he heard it, and was sure he understood, he simply did not know how to forget. (For her fascinating account of the process, see pp. 324-359, in “Language in the Isolated Culture,” Dr. Jennifer R. Boxill, S&S. 1985.)

As soon as the bare minimum of mutual language was effective, Lucky (again) initiated the next step in cultural exchange. He had been showing up at the camp just after breakfast each morning; this day he came an hour earlier, with a basket of woven reeds on his arm. It was my day for KP, and I was opening a can of bacon when he came up and touched my arm, showing me the basket. "Try my food?" he said.

The basket was filled with fresh steamed fish, still hot, each on its own new-baked half-loaf of native meal bread. At the bottom, five small pots of blue clay—the same stuff the Guardian Figure was molded in—held a savory vegetable sauce to be poured over fish and bread.

It was very good, but that seemed, at the time, irrelevant. The greatest significance of the gift was learning that our self-appointed guide and mascot was, it seemed, fully accredited in his friendship by the—so far—invisible parents and elders of the village.

I should say, "parents or elders," because we were uncertain. When we asked if he'd prepared the food himself, he laughed uproariously and then said, with ostentatious patience, "*Mothers* cook food." Whether he meant mothers as a class (and in this case *his* mother), or several

women of the class, mother, we did not know.

Both assumptions were wrong, as it happened. He meant *his mothers*.

IT TOOK us most of six months, to reach a level of communication at which mistakes of this sort could be cleared up. And from that time on, it seemed as though most of our discussions consisted of substituting closer approximations for old misconceptions. The more we learned, the more complex was what we had to learn. As for Lucky's wrong assumptions about us, they took even longer for him to recognize, and more time yet for us to realize he'd had them. We had been on the island the best part of a year before we gained any comprehension of the extent to which our presence had affected the boy himself. And through all that time, we so carefully leaned over backwards to avoid showing special interest in the Shrine, that we had never learned of Lucky's particular infatuation with it!

All through our second season on the island (by their time reckoning), we were pumping a steady flow of information out of the boy. We learned the basic economy and social structure of the island; how to reckon seasons, and count age and status. He explained the system of edu-

cation and apprenticeship, the courtship and marriage customs. When he did not know answers to what we asked, he would say, "Hallall; hallall you will know." And next day, or next week, or even next season, he would come back with the answer. Most answers, that is. Sometimes the second answer too was, "hallall." But then, he would add, "Hallall, I shall know, and then you too."

We worried, occasionally, about what was happening to Lucky, in his own village—whether his contact with us singled him out for better or worse. What we never imagined was the delight of his parents (He had nine at the time; Dr. Henry Cogswell's article in *Anthropological Review*, II, 1983, pp. 19-26, gives a brief comprehensive analysis of island family relationships.) and teachers and the older people in general at the effect we had on him.

IN the pursuit of the knowledge we asked, Lucky had gone back to learn himself all the things he had scorned to observe before we came: Now, he watched weavers and planters and netters of fish, masons and flutists and arrowmakers, with a concentrated attention that he had reserved before only for matters concerning the Shrine. The older people watched, and were pleased. They had always

thought well of the boy. He was marked as lucky from birth. When it had seemed clear he would be a Shrineman, they had been, not disappointed so much as surprised. It did not seem quite suitable for one so lavishly endowed. Now he was learning, as they had expected, all matters of concern to the people. If it were what he wished, he would of course be a Shrineman; but they began speaking of him now as a future Firstman.

The pinky strangers ("Pinkies" was what they called us.) whose advent was otherwise inexplicable and perhaps a bit disturbing, had perhaps been sent to train a leader among the people, as the people themselves had not known how to do—

So they reasoned; at the least, they decided, we *were* causing Lucky to learn what they had hoped he would, whether that was our purpose in coming or not. At the very least, it was indirectly due to us that they had made sure of his extraordinary capacities, which had been indicated as probable by various features of his birth and growth, but had never before been fully displayed. (The eidetic memory was as impressive to them as to us; and his intelligence was high, even in that high-average society. Chapter X of Dr. G. M. Lazslo's, "Environment and Intelligence," S&S, 1987, deals

with our findings on the island, for those who are interested.)

Two of his fathers came to thank us.

It was the first visit we had from anyone but Lucky. Out of simple courtesy, no adult would have come into our camp without some such cause. Out of simple caution, we might never have entered their village without that prior visit. It was our opening contact with the group as a whole.

THE fathers were overjoyed to discover that Jennie spoke their language with some proficiency. That made it possible to dismiss Lucky, and thank us without requiring him to translate praise of himself or of his friends. We told them in return how much we admired and relied on the boy—and how very pleased we were to learn that our influence had helped him adjust to his own world, and not put him out of tune with it.

That is what we meant to say, but Jennie did not know any word in their language for “adjust” or “maladjusted.” She tried “out of season,” and got only smiling puzzlement. She made a long speech full of metaphor and analogy, and finally one of them said, “oklall?”

Oklall, Lucky had told us, was the opposite of *hallall*. They seemed to think we had been con-

cerned about Lucky yesterday, but not tomorrow. We let well enough alone at that point, and offered food instead of conversation. Lucky rejoined us, and took obvious pride in piloting his fathers' way through the strange meal. When they left, we had our invitation to visit the village—paradoxical, when we thought of it, since what had occasioned the thanks-paying was our previous inability to go in person.

IF the fathers had the same thought, it would not have worried them. If we understood, as we thought we did, what *hallall* meant, we would have known they'd see no cause to worry. They had seen his potential, displayed clearly, and were naturally content to let Lallayall's nature take its own course. *Hallall*, he would learn all he needed to know. *Hallall*, he would grow to his proper adult place. If he needed help or encouragement, they would provide it. The expectations they had begun to have before his preoccupation with the Shrine, expectations based on his birth and early growth, now seemed once again probable. Perhaps, as time grew closer for a Rebirth, it was necessary for a future Firstman to know more of the Shrine than was usual. His unlikely interest in Shrinemen might then mean only that he would be Firstman

at the time of a Rebirth. Lalla-yall—Lucky—indeed! He was well-called.

As for us, we were too busy and excited with our new observing privileges, and more than that, with the news of Lucky's special concern with the Shrine, to think of the oddity of that *tomorrow-yesterday*, misunderstanding. We assumed, from his fathers' manner of mentioning it, that the Shrine was not taboo in discussion. It seemed we might also hope, eventually, to be allowed to examine it in person: if a child could spend his time there freely, when his parents disapproved, it was not unreasonable to hope that visitors might be invited.

One other assumption, based on our experience of Lucky's learning powers, proved unfounded: there was almost nothing he was able to tell us about the Shrine or Shrinemen, except just such visual descriptions as we now dared to hope might be redundant. He described the Figures, the blue Guardian on the Window of Light, and the amber Lifegiver on the scroll pedestal. He painted a vivid word picture of the reptiloid grace of the Lifegiver, the menacine power of the Guardian. About the Shrinemen and their lives he knew many minute details—but none of significance. They ate thus, slept so, conversed in the

courtyard; they were celibate, wore brown robes with a design patterned on the Window of Light; they had daily rituals to say; they performed certain calculations. *Hallall*, they would officiate at the Recurrence, the Rebirth.

FROM the Oldest Men in the 'village, of whom there were three, in their Seventh Age, we learned more—if what we learned was fact. They could all recall, in young childhood, seeing the Life of the Shrine then extant. There had been no Recurrence since then, nor had it occurred in their lives, but before they were born.

In twenty-five decades, they said, the Life would Recur. It was soon, soon . . .

And saying so, they glanced significantly at Lucky. *Hallall*, a Rebirth . . .

That word again—*hallall*. In the village and fields, we heard it incessantly. It was the only no-answer a child ever got. No question was forbidden for young ones to ask—but some were not answered in First Age, and some not in Second. *Hallall*, they were told, *hallall*, ye shall know.

"When do we plant firstseed?" a child might ask.

"In the day following the third full moon of Seedfall," he would be told.

"Which seed is firstseed?"
And he would be shown.

"What comes of it?" "When do we harvest it?" "How is it stored?" "Who plants it?" "Who knows the full moon?"

All these would be answered and fully, readily. The people would lay down their work, if need be, to go with a questioning child and show him the answer.

But—"Why does it grow?" "How does the Firstman know which round moon is the *full* moon?" or "Why do people seed themselves all year round, but fawns and fish only in Green-growth Season?"

Then the answer was always, "*Hallall*," given with a glad smile for the child who was thinking ahead of his years. First age children were to learn only what could be seen, touched, smelled, or heard. *Why* and *wherefore* were for Second Agers, the adolescent apprentices. So—

"*Hallall*, little one . . ."

IT WAS listening to the teaching of children that we finally came round to understand what the word meant. We had thought it was "tomorrow"—or "later," vaguely. Then for a while we thought it just an evasion, a sort of "I don't know either; perhaps some day we'll both find out." But what it meant, precisely, was, "In the fullness of time."

The distinction is not nearly as much in the words as in the kind of thinking that must lie behind them. Shrine Islanders, for instance, fear death less than any society known—and this with no trace of belief in discrete immortality. In the fullness of time one is born, grows and learns, loves, weds, and begets, rears children, teaches the younger ones, acquires status, grows feeble and dies. If death comes, then one's time is full.

From the answers that were and were not given youngsters in Lucky's Age Group, we also came to understand how we must have troubled him with our determined questioning about the Shrinemen. Here, too, we had progressed through a series of dead-wrong assumptions. Because Lucky told us of books and calculations, of ideographs on the Shrine (which he could reproduce flawlessly, but with no comprehension); because he had never seen books in the village, or never spoke of them; because he, the brightest of his Age group, went daily to the House of Shrinemen, we first took for granted that the Shrinemen were priestly scholars, perhaps the guardians of an ancient culture, their role symbolized by the red-maced blue Guardian Figure protecting the "Lifegiver"—a goddess, clearly, but perhaps of wisdom rather than fertility.

The reptilian appearance suggested this strongly. Henry got very enthusiastic about the correlation of snakes and divinely protected knowledge. "Rebirth" could imply a predictable renaissance—and that suggested the ugly thought that the secrecy of the Shrinemen's rites and formulae was that of an unplanned bureaucracy perpetuating itself by withholding the knowledge it had been set up to protect and disseminate . . .

WHEN we understood what *hallall* meant, we had to revise this unhappy picture, for much of what Lucky did not know was not secret at all—just *hallall* at his age. By that time, also, we had heard from the three Oldest Men such mutually confirming details of the appearance and function of the Life of the Shrine, that the whole notion of a usurping bureaucracy became absurd. "Rebirth" was no symbol, but a literal incarnation of new wisdom, presented at intervals of roughly—by our time—eighty years. The incarnation took the form of a froglike creature at least roughly resembling the statue and relief Figures at the Shrine. (The old men recalled an identical appearance, except for color, which was grey—but they were old and remembering a strongly suggestible childhood.)

So the Shrinemen became shamans, half-ignorant half-wise witchdoctors applying without understanding some ancient formulae designed to release increments of knowledge slowly to a population reverted—for what strange intriguing reasons?—to barbarism. The near-idyllic society we saw was the planned result of this program; and the quiet patience of the *hallall* philosophy made sense now; *hallall*, all would be known. We need only wait; *hallall* . . .

But for witchdoctors, the Shrinemen were poor showmen. Neither did they do healing (any more than they governed; both of these were functions of all other people who lived into the Second Decade of the Sixth Age). The shaman theory began to fall apart the night George found out the man next to him at a haybringing dance was a "shaman," off duty for the party; the putative witchdoctor invited us all, very casually, to visit him at the Shrine. There had never been any taboo; no one suspected we might be interested.

WE found the Shrinemen, as we had first assumed they would be, educated and cultured, in the bookish sense, far above the level of the other islanders. They were intelligent men devoted to a faith, or more, to a

duty. When Rebirth occurred, it was necessary that they be on hand, trained in the formulae of sacrifice. Without their precise weights and measures and chants, the Life of the Shrine would be monstrous and harmful.

The Oldest Men, we suggested, were saying it was near *hallall* for Recurrence . . . ?

The Shrinemen nodded. They brought out a register, a long papyrus-like scroll. One fourth of its length was filled with ideographs—like those on the Shrine itself, tantalizingly like, but unlike, three different ancient languages Jennv *did* know . . .

On this scroll, they said, was the listing of dates and persons connected with Shrine Life. The first entry, in barely legible, long-faded ink, went back—they said—almost 350 decades, nearly 1200 years, as we reckon. One of them spread the scroll on a lectern, and began intoning with such singsong regularity it was evident he was reciting by rote, and not actually reading.

Yet there was an air of authenticity about their list; whether it was in the scroll or not, whether they could read the symbols or not, we somehow believed that the time intervals—ranging from nineteen to thirty decades between Recurrences—were legitimate history.

The question was—history of *what*?

The answer, of course, was—*hallall*.

If our supplies lasted until the Recurrence, we'd know what it was. Not *why*, or *wherefore*, but *how* and *what*, *when* and *who*. To the Life of the Shrine, it seemed, we were all as First Agers . . .

THUS we arrived at our last misconception regarding the Shrinemen. They were—obviously—an especially non-virulent academic breed of priest, serving their temple with civilized pleasant lives devoted to learning, discussion, and ritual. *Hallall*, what they re-memorized every day would be of not just use, but great need . . .

Happily, we understood Lucky by that time at least better than we did the Shrine; as a result, we did not plague him with our latest errors—and plaguing they would have been, to say the least. Religion, as we know it, had no words in the Shrine Island language. *Sin*, *priest*, *faith*, *morals*, were not only, in complexity, subjects suitable only for adults—they were concepts unknown to the people. We did not intend to introduce them.

Since it would have been Lucky to whom we expressed these thoughts first, it is doubly fortunate we did not do so, for Lucky

was lucky. From the time of his birth on, it was the outstanding trait of his young life.

In the calendar of the Shrine Islanders, there are three seasons to mark the year's circuit: first is Greengrowth, when the soil is renewed, when the creatures of forest and river renew life, a time of thriving for all young things. Then comes Ripening, when fawns, fish, and fruit come to full size and plumpness. Last, there is Seedfall, when pods and clouds burst to shower the land with the next season's new life, when bucks rage in combat throughout the forest, and such spawning fish as survived the nets of the Season of Ripening spawn by the thousands far up the river.

The calendar of events, of people's lives, is composed of these seasons, in sets of ten. Each Decade of Seasons has separate significance in the course of a lifetime. Three Decades make up an Age of Life.

It is auspicious among the people, to have Greengrowth for the ruling season of one's First Age. Lucky, born lucky in Greengrowth, would come to his First Rites, dividing childhood from apprenticeship, innocence from approaching courtship, just as the seasons changed from Greengrowth to the appropriate Ripening. Three decades later, his Full Manhood Rites would coincide

with the change of the natural world from Ripening to Seedfall.

SUCH children were known to be fortunate in their growing, somehow in tune with the world more than others. In Lucky's case, each sign at every stage of development had confirmed the extraordinary augury of his birth on the first morning of a Greengrowth season. And it was for the same reason that his early interest in the Shrine had so startled his elders; a child of his sort was seldom attracted by abstraction or mental mystery; certainly, the children of Greengrowth were too much in tune with the soil to make likely celibates.

There is a certain innocence, when you think of it, implicit in the idea of luck. A truly *lucky* person has, always, a certain natural and glorious naivete—a sort of superior unconsciousness, which can do for some people, in their acts and impulses, precisely what the well-trained, reflex reactions of a star athlete do for his body. The special ability to seize the right moment with the right hand is as vulnerable to conscious thought as the act of high-jumping would be to a man who tried to think each muscle separately into action.

So it is well that we did not force on Lucky the exercise of the metaphysical part of his

mind that his keen intelligence could never have refused, once offered.

WE had been almost five full seasons on the island, when the second ship came. Lucky, of course, with his rare instinct, was walking in the woods when it landed, not half a mile from where it came down.

Three people emerged—three more Pinkies! Rejoicing, the boy ran to greet them, one thought predominant in his young mind: here at last was the making of a Pinkie family! Seven is the minimum number of adults in an island household. We had never attempted to explain our marriage customs to him; frankly, living on the island, we had come to feel a little ashamed of confessing our one-to-one possessiveness. We had simply allowed them to keep their first misimpression that we did not have children because we were too few in number for a proper household.

With these thoughts in mind, he ran forward and greeted the strangers in clear pure English, offering to guide them immediately to our camp.

They seem to have managed a rapid recovery, when one considers the shock this must have provided. Politely, they excused themselves, and announced they had come, not to join us (whom

they had never heard of, of course) but to pay their respects to the famous Shrine.

Lucky led them there. On the way, they talked pleasantly with him, pleasantly but wrongly. They did not sound like Pinkies—not like the Pinkies he knew. Vaguely, he sensed something *oklall*—unripe, green, out of place and time. Gradually, his answers to the oversweet probings of the female among them became less clear, so that by the time she asked the two crucial questions, he was almost incoherent.

They did not find out how many Pinkies were on the island nor how many others spoke English. If they had known there were only four of us, unarmed academics, and only Lucky besides ourselves who would ever know how to tell the world outside what happened, they would surely have been less precipitate. As it was, they were on edge.

HE took them directly to the Shrine Window. This in itself was odd; it was bad etiquette; he should have presented them first to the Shrinemen. But he was already acting under the impulse of that strange quality of luckiness that ruled his life.

Then he found himself staring at Lifegiver, terribly torn and uncertain, not knowing why he had done such a thing, or why he

had spoken to them softly, in false friendship. The amber figure glowed in double light: sunlight cascading from the unroofed courtyard, and the golden glow from inside the Window.

He—I believe it was he—said later that he did what he did just because she was beautiful: a simple act of adoration. I suppose he was confused, aware of a responsibility too large for his young shoulders, and seeking guidance of some sort. That at least is more rational than the notion that he acted then out of the pure unconsciousness of his special—lucky—nature. I know, because I watched it happen, that he moved forward in an almost trancelike manner.

(Everything from the moment of the meeting in the forest up to this point I know only from having been told. What occurred in the courtyard I saw for myself. It was almost time for the Shrinemen's evening ritual, and Henry and I were on the hilltop, with binoculars, watching.)

This is what happened:—

Lallayall stepped forward and fell to his knees before the statue of the Lifegiver. He reached up, and his lanky arms were just long enough to wrap around her smooth stone legs. He gazed up at her, and then bent his head, resting it against the carvings at the top of the scroll pedestal.

At the instant of contact, the

mace fell from the hands of the Blue Guardian.

The two men were fast. One jumped for the mace, one for Lucky. While the second one held the boy still, the first studied the rod and the Figure, and then reached out with the red mace and seemed to be twisting it against something on the Window. (After much discussion and examination, we came to the conclusion that it was the Guardian's eye he was twisting. The open end of the rod is exactly the shape and size of the opal eye of the Guardian.)

We did not see the Window open. It opened inwards, and our angle of vision was wrong. But we knew what was happening from the oddly expressive way the three intruders stood and stared, at the Window and at each other—questioning, triumphant, frightened, uncertain. We also saw the Shrinemen coming, a split second before the woman did. We saw her point and heard her cry faintly from down below.

The other turned to look, and all three lost their irresolution. They moved as one, taking Lucky with them. All four vanished (from our angle of view) inside the Shrine.

THE Shrinemen came to a full stop in front of the Window. Had it closed again? I looked at Henry for the first time, and

found him turning to look at me; it suddenly occurred to us that we ought to be doing something to help.

"You stay," he said. "I'll get the others, go on down. Keep watching."

It was the sensible way to do it. We were both torn between having to see it all and the need to help. This way we did both.

I nodded, and put the glasses back to my eyes. Incredibly, the Shrinemen were arranging themselves in their evening ritual position, as calmly as though it were any sundown; they formed their semicircle in front of the window, and brought forth the shining silver-tipped quills that were their badge of office, held them up like dart-throwers, as they always did, and began their sundown chant!

Perhaps the Window had not closed before. If it had, it opened again. My first thought was that the Guardian Figure had fallen. But it was not a Figure. It was alive.

It was blue and glistening, and it sprang down to the ground, crouched, alert, so clearly menacing in its intentions it was not necessary to see the face to understand the inherent malice. It had barely touched ground when a quill—a *dart*, rather—from the first Shrineman in the semicircle caught it in the face. (The eye, I have always assumed

—the same left eye that must be the key to the Shrine?)

By that time, another had leaped out—and the next dart brought it down. It went so almost-casually, so rhythmically, so soundlessly, and with such economy of motion on both sides, that it seemed unreal. There were ten of the blue things altogether; at the sixth, I took my eyes from the glasses, blinked, shook my head, and looked back, unbelieving. I saw the same thing.

But remember—I did have that moment of doubt.

WITHOUT any break in the rhythm, the eleventh figure came out of the Shrine. It was not blue, or crouching or perilous; it was brown-gold of skin, and leaped like a dancer, and as it landed the Shrinemen who still held their darts poised, dropped them, and the whole semicircle burst into a chant of tremendous, overwhelming joy and welcoming.

They faltered just once—when, still in the same timing, the twelfth creature came forth, a twin to the first gold-brown incarnation of the Lifegiver. For perhaps two beats of the song there was obvious confusion; then it rang out again, louder and more joyous.

But those who had dropped unused darts retrieved them.

THEY finished the song, the two Lives of the Shrine standing inside their circle, apart from the heap of lifeless blue bodies. Then—the Window must have closed meantime; they clearly knew the Rebirth was completed—four of them walked to the two shining creatures bowed to them (in the islanders bow of courtesy—not one of reverence), and led them into the House. The others approached the dead entities, picked them up, and carried them off, around the House, out of sight.

My stage was empty. I waited till dark, but saw no more. Not till I started down to the camp did I even wonder what had become of Henry and the others, who should have had time to arrive at the scene before the chant began. I found out when they joined me a few minutes after I got back to camp: the gates of the Shrine courtyard had been closed and barred; they had knocked and called out and waited—also till dark—without answer. They had heard the chant of rejoicing; they had seen nothing.

I told them what I had seen. I told it hesitantly; I did not completely believe my own memory. When, next day, and the days after that, all our questions and probings produced only mildly stratled or baffled replies from villagers and Shrinemen

alike, we decided I had been the victim of some extraordinarily powerful hypnotic illusion.

We felt fairly sure of what part of it Henry and I had seen together; and this was further supported by the presence of a strange ship in the forest, with no passengers—and by Lucky's disappearance.

We left the island a few weeks later. Our supplies might have lasted another month, but we all felt restless, and we missed Lucky, both personally and in our work. We knew there were answers we could not get from anyone, about what happened. But we saw no likelihood of getting them by staying longer. And we had to report the strange ship.

We agreed that as far as we knew—as far as four so-called scientists could claim to know anything—four people had entered the Shrine; a watcher on the hilltop (Henry's article so describes me) experienced an extraordinarily vivid hallucination or hypnotic illusion afterwards, during the ritual chant.

FOR the others, that agreement was sufficient. *They* hadn't had the "hallucination."

I went back. And of course, we had left too soon. Our questions had been, naturally, *oklall* The Life of the Shrine is never revealed until the next Rites . . .

This time it was a tremendous revelation; never before had twin Lives occurred.

I STAYED two full seasons on the Island, that second trip. This time, I lived, in a special visitor's capacity, with Lallayah's family. I learned to speak their language much better, and I spent many hours in talk with the Shrinemen and with the Lives.

The Lives told me about Lucky's meeting with the strange Pinkies; they told me how he felt when he fell on his knees before the Lifegiver; they told me they were reborn of him in the Shrine.

They told me how it felt, but could not tell me how or why it happened. They did not know. We all speculated—the Lives, the Shrinemen, and I—on what the Shrine itself might be, and what sort of force could produce ten glistening blue demons from three evil humans, and two golden angels from one lucky boy.

With all the speculation, and all I was told, I came back with not one shred of scientific evidence that anything of the sort happened. For all I know, the Lives may still be an hypnotic illusion produced by the Shrinemen; they may be some sort of

periodic mutation. They may be Lucky Reborn.

They do not know, any more than I, how the Shrine came to be there, or what happened inside a chamber which they describe only as "filled with great light."

I tried approaching the Lifegiver, as Lucky had. The Shrinemen gave full permission, clearly amused. Nothing happened, though I tried it often, with minute variations of head and hand positions.

I may have missed the exact pressure points; I may have had the wrong attitude. I believe, myself, that I simply do not have the kind of unconsciousness Lucky had.

My own tendency, also, is to believe that the Shrine is a sort of outpost of some other planet—but why this should feel any more "scientific" to me than the Shrinemen's belief in an ancient lost magic, I don't know.

The Shrinemen, by the way, are still worried over some things. The weight of the entering bodies was never ascertained, they point out. If there was unused mass left inside the Shrine, they cannot say what may come forth the next time a pure innocent embraces goodness for her own sake.

THE END

*She was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen . . .
so pliant . . . so yielding . . . so all-enfolding . . .*

the soft woman

By THEODORE L. THOMAS

OWEN SARDULE brushed his fingertips against the silken drapery, and then cupped it in his hands and pressed it to his face. He felt the cloth grow hot under his breath, and he turned his cheek into the warm spot. He straightened reluctantly and continued his inspection of the suite. The rugs were satisfyingly deep beneath his feet. The bed was downy, the sofas yielding, and the chairs comfortably enfolded his big frame. The room was beautifully furnished, except for the picture near the French doors. It made a splash of bright colors, garish and harsh to Sardule's eye. He walked to it and read the name in the lower right-hand corner, "Matisse." He lifted the picture from the wall and dropped it in the waste-basket.

Sardule began to unpack, running his hands over the soft linens and cottons and silks as he put them away. He took maMal

from its case and placed the doll on the mantelpiece, and then he took it down and rubbed it between his hands. He squeezed it to feel the familiar soft pliancy, and he rubbed it against his lips to smell the faint, bitter odor. He touched it with his tongue and felt the faint stirrings inside him. He placed maMal back on the mantelpiece and stared at it, at the rounded contours of the nude, feminine body, all smooth and flowing and soft and sweet, and blending at the top into the head of a frog.

Sardule finished unpacking and went out on the balcony. The evening air was soft and warm and faintly scented, and for a moment Sardule almost knew why he had come back. The sheer beauty of the island, that must be it. But even as he thought of it he knew it wasn't true. There were other beautiful places in the world, places where a man was far more likely to find a beauti-

ful woman than here. Yet it had been here that he had found—what was her name?—Torre . . . or Tarra . . . something? Vaguely he remembered. With all the adolescent skirt-liftings behind him, she had been his first conquest in the name of love, the first citadel to yield, the first in a long line of sweet victories. How old had he been? Twenty? Yes, about that. And she had been the same, perhaps a little older, full of soft fire and murmurings and moans. She would be old now, disgusting to look at.

Sardule turned his face up into the soft wind and looked at the stars. There were no clouds, no mists, yet the stars appeared hazy and dim. Sardule shook his head and looked again, but there was no change. He looked down at the ground, and saw that the palm trees and ferns in the formal gardens seemed diffuse and misty. He was about to turn back to his room in annoyance when a flash of movement in the garden caught his eye. A woman walked along the path. He saw her clearly, saw the way her dress pressed against her body as she walked through the soft night air.

SARDULE stared down at her and felt his throat thicken. The roundness, the promise, the raw call of her reached up to him.

He stared, unable to breathe. Her full-fleshed body, clothed in clinging white, stood out ice-clear against the misty garden. Hers was not the lithe, athletic body that he despised, not the equally abhorrent big-boned, big-breasted kind. Hers was soft and full and round, and he knew that the sweet smell of her drifted toward him, and he found himself able to breath again.

She reached the far end of the garden. He raised his hand to call to her, but then his instinct took command. This was no way to do it. Here was a prize worthy of his best efforts, and he should run no risk of losing.

He turned and went out the door, almost running. The elevator was not at the floor, so he took the stairs and went through the lobby, ignoring the many "Good evening, Mr. Sardule" that followed him. When he reached the garden she was no longer in sight, but her odor was there, pungent and sweet, and he followed it to the path that led along the shore. He saw her then, walking along the beach, her head back, her black hair trailing softly in the evening breeze. Rapidly he caught up with her, planning his campaign with practiced ease. When he came to her side he said softly, "I have seen many beautiful women, but never anyone to equal the sight of you, walking through the garden."

She turned her face toward him, and he felt his heart wrench. Her eyes were great and black and far apart, and her lips were full and round and wet. She smiled, and it was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. She said, "Thank you," and her voice was soft and husky.

With great effort he took his eyes from her face and walked silently by her side. This was the way to do it with this one. No talk needed here, merely the flattery of his silent adoration. He held himself straight, letting her know that he was acutely aware of her presence by walking slightly turned toward her. After awhile he took her hand and placed it on his arm. They came to where the path turned out to the little peninsula, and he led her into the dim restaurant and seated her at a table in a dark corner. They did not speak during dinner. She smiled her thanks when he helped her, and her breath came quick when he gently leaned against her. Toward the end of the dinner Sardule could no longer eat; they stared into each other's eyes, holding hands beneath the table. They left, and walked quickly back to the hotel and went in the side door and walked up the stairs.

Swiftly he put out the lights, save the dim one on the table by the French doors. His hands

shook uncontrollably when he began to undress her; They were no longer the hands of the learned expert. There were no buttons or hooks or straps or zippers, merely an intricate winding of a single piece of diaphanous cloth. He dropped to one knee to finish removing her gown, and she raised her arms and slowly pirouetted before him to help remove the last of the cloth from her hips. He finished, but she continued to turn, looking down at him when she faced him, looking up as her back turned toward him, wetting her lips and making soft moaning sounds deep in her throat.

Sardule stood up and tore off his own clothes. She watched him, no longer turning, but moving her hips slowly back and forth toward him. And just before he finished she ran lightly to the bed and flung herself on it and slowly turned over to him. He followed.

It was morning before the familiar, sweet, sickening smell brought in the others. Sardule lay on the bed, bulging eyes staring, throat choked on a scream forever silenced, hands buried to the wrists in a dripping softness that only vaguely resembled a woman. On the mantelpiece stood a small doll, swathed in a long, thin strip of rotted cloth flecked with black spots of rich, loamy earth.

THE END

the SUDDEN AFTERNOON

By J. G. BALLARD

Illustrator FINLAY

He had never been in India!

Why, then, did he remember his brown-

skinned father rowing him across

the burning Ganges?

WHAT surprised Elliott was the suddenness of the attack. Judith and the children had done down to the coast for the weekend to catch the last of the summer, leaving him alone in the house, and the three days had been a pleasant reverie of si-

lent rooms, meals taken at random hours, and a little mild carpentry in the work-shop. He spent Sunday morning reading all the reviews in the newspapers, carefully adding half a dozen titles to the list of books which he knew he would never





manage to buy, let alone read. These wistful exercises, like the elaborately prepared martini before lunch, were part of the established ritual of his brief bachelor moments. He decided to take a brisk walk across Hampstead Heath after lunch, returning in time to tidy everything away before Judith arrived that evening.

Instead, a sharp attack of what first appeared to be influenza struck him just before one o'clock. A throbbing headache and a soaring temperature sent him fumbling to the medicine cabinet in the bathroom, only to find that Judith had taken the aspirin with her. Sitting on the edge of the bath, forehead in his hands, he nursed the spasm, which seemed to contract the muscles of some inner scalp, compressing his brain like fruit-pulp in a linen bag.

"Judith!" he shouted to the empty house. "Damn!"

The pain mounted, an intense prickling that drove silver needles through his skull. Helpless for a moment, he propelled himself into the bedroom and climbed fully dressed into the bed, shielding his eyes from the weak sunlight which crossed the Heath.

After a few minutes the attack subsided slightly, leaving him with a nagging migraine and a sense of utter inertia. For

the next hour he stared at the reflection of himself in the dressing table mirror, lying like a trussed steer across the bed. Through the window he watched a small boy playing under the oaks by the edge of the park, patiently trying to catch the spiraling leaves. Twenty yards away a nondescript little man with a dark complexion sat alone on a bench, staring through the trees.

IN some way this scene soothed Elliott, and the headache finally dissipated, as if charmed away by the swaying boughs and the leaping figure of the boy.

"Strange . . ." he murmured to himself, still puzzled by the ferocity of the attack. Judith, however, would be skeptical; she had always accused him of being a hypochondriac. It was a pity she hadn't been there, instead of lying about on the beach at Worthing, but at least the children had been spared the spectacle of their father yelping with agony.

Reluctant to get out of bed and precipitate another attack—perhaps it was due to some virulent but short-lived virus?—Elliott lay back, the scent of his wife's skin on the pillow reminding him of his own childhood and his mother's perfumed hair. He had been brought up in India, and remembered being rowed across a river by his father, the great placid back of the

Ganges turning crimson in the late afternoon light. The burnt-earth colors of the Calcutta waterfront were still vivid after an interval of thirty years.

Smiling pleasantly over this memory, and at the image of his father rowing with a rhythmic lulling motion, Elliott gazed upwards at the ceiling, only distracted by the distant hoot of a car horn.

Then he sat up abruptly, staring sharply at the room around him.

"Calcutta? What the hell—?"

The memory had been completely false! He had never been to India in his life, or anywhere near the Far East. He had been born in London, and lived there all his life apart from a two-year post-graduate visit to the United States. As for his father, who had been captured by the Germans while fighting with the Eighth Army in North Africa and spent most of the war as a P.O.W., Elliott had seen almost nothing of him until his adolescence.

Yet the memory of being rowed across the Ganges had been extraordinarily strong. Trying to shake off the last residue of the headache, Elliott swung his feet on to the floor. The throbbing had returned slightly, but in a curious way receded as he let the image of the Calcutta waterfront fill his mind. What-

ever its source, the landscape was certainly Indian, and he could see the Ganges steps, a clutter of sailing dhows and even a few meagre funeral pyres smoking on the embankment.

But what most surprised him were the emotional associations of this false memory of being rowed by his father, the sense of reassurance that came with each rhythmic motion of the dark figure, whose face was hidden by the shadows of the setting sun.

WONDERING where he had collected this powerful visual impression which had somehow translated itself into a memory with unique personal undertones, Elliott left the bedroom and made his way down to the kitchen. It was now half past two, almost too late for lunch, and he stared without interest at the rows of eggs and milk bottles in the refrigerator. After lunch, he decided, he would settle down on the sofa in the lounge and read or watch television.

At the thought of the latter Elliott realized that the false memory of the Ganges was almost certainly a forgotten fragment of a film travelogue, probably one he had seen as a child. The whole sequence of the memory, with its posed shot of the boat cutting through the crimson water and the long traverse

of the waterfront, were typical of the style of the travelogues made in the nineteen-forties, and he could almost see the credit titles coming up with a roll of drums.

Reassured by this, and assuming that the headache had somehow jolted loose this visual memory—the slightly blurred war-time cinema screens had often strained his eyes—Elliott began to prepare his lunch. He ignored the food Judith had left for him and hunted among the spices and pickle jars in the pantry, where he found some rice and a packet of curry powder. Judith had never mastered the intricacies of making a real curry, and Elliott's own occasional attempts had merely elicited amused smiles. Today, however, with ample time on his hands and no interference, he would succeed.

Unhurriedly Elliott began to prepare the dish, and the kitchen soon filled with steam and the savory odors of curry powder and chutney. Outside the thin sunlight gave way to darker clouds and the first afternoon rain. The small boy had gone, but the solitary figure under the oaks still sat on the bench, jacket collar turned up around his neck.

Delighted by the simmering brew, Elliott relaxed on his stool, and thought about his medical practice. Normally he would

have been obliged to hold an evening surgery, but his locum had arranged to take over for him, much to his relief, as one of the patients had been particularly difficult—a complete neurotic, a hazard faced by every doctor, she had even threatened to report him to the general medical council for misconduct, though the allegations were so grotesque the disciplinary committee would not consider them seriously for a moment.

THE curry had been strong, and a sharp pain under the sternum marked the beginning of a bout of indigestion. Cursing his bad luck, Elliott poured a glass of milk, sorry to lose the flavor of the curry.

"You're in bad shape, old sport," he said to himself with ironic humor. "You ought to see a doctor."

With a sudden snap of his fingers he stood up. He had experienced his second false memory! The whole reverie about his medical practice, the locum and the woman patient were absolute fictions, unrelated to anything in his life. Professionally he was a research chemist, employed in the biochemistry department of one of the London cancer institutes, but his contacts with physicians and surgeons were virtually nil.

And yet the impression of hav-

ing a medical practice, patients and all the other involvements of a busy doctor was remarkably strong and persistent—indeed, far more than a memory but a coherent area of awareness as valid as the image of the biochemistry laboratory.

With a growing sense of unease, Elliott sipped weakly at the tumbler of milk, wondering why these sourceless images, like fragments from the intelligence of some other individual, were impinging themselves on his mind. He went into the lounge and sat down with his back to the window, examining himself with as much professional detachment as he could muster. Behind him, under the trees in the park, the man on the bench sat silently in the rain, eyed at a safe distance by a wandering mongrel.

After a pause to collect himself, Elliott deliberately began to explore this second false memory. Immediately he noticed that the dyspepsia subsided, as if assuming the persona of the fragmented images relieved their pressure upon his mind. Concentrating, he could see a high window above a broad mahogany desk, a padded leather couch, shelves of books and framed certificates on the walls, unmistakably a doctor's consulting rooms. Leaving the room, he passed down a broad flight of carpeted

stairs into a marble-floored hall. A desk stood in an alcove on the left, and a pretty red-haired receptionist looked up and smiled to him across her typewriter. Then he was outside in the street, obviously in a well-to-do quarter of the city, where Rolls-Royces and Bentleys almost outnumbered the other cars. Two hundred yards away double-decker buses crossed a familiar intersection.

"Harley Street!" Elliott snapped. As he sat up and looked around at the familiar furniture in the lounge and the drenched oaks in the park, with an effort re-establishing their reality in his mind, he had a last glimpse of the front elevation of the consulting chambers, a blurred name-plate on the cream-painted columns. Over the portico were the gilt italic numerals: 259.

"Two fifty-nine Harley Street? Now who the devil works there?" Elliott stood up and went over to the window, staring out across the Heath, then paced into the kitchen and savored the residue of the curry aroma. Again a spasm of indigestion gripped his stomach, and he immediately focussed on the image of the unknown doctor's consulting rooms. As the pain faded he had a further impression of a small middle-aged woman in a hospital ward, her left arm in a cast, and then a picture of the staff and

consultants' entrance to the Middlesex Hospital, as vivid as a photograph.

PICKING up the newspaper, Elliott returned to the lounge, settling himself with difficulty. The absolute clarity of the memories convinced him that they were not confused images taken from cine-films or elaborated by his imagination. The more he explored them the more they fixed their own reality, refusing to fade or vanish. In addition, the emotional content was too strong. The associations of the childhood river scene were reassuring, but the atmosphere in the consulting rooms had been fraught with hesitation and anxiety, as if their original possessor was in the grip of a nightmare.

The headache still tugged at his temples, and Elliott went over to the cocktail cabinet and poured himself a large whisky and soda. Had he in some incredible way simultaneously become the receiver of the dismembered memories of a small Indian boy in Calcutta and a Harley Street consultant?

Glancing at the front news page, his eye caught:

INDIAN DOCTOR SOUGHT

Wife's Mystery Death

Police are continuing their search for the missing Har-

ley Street psychiatrist, Dr. Krishnamurti Singh. Scotland Yard believes he may be able to assist them in their inquiries into the death of his wife, Mrs. Ramadaya Singh . . .

With a surge of relief, Elliott slapped the newspaper and tossed it across the room. So this explained the two imaginary memories! Earlier that morning, before the influenza attack, he had read the news item without realizing it, then during the light fever had dramatized the details. The virulent virus—a rare short-lived strain he had picked up at the laboratory—presumably acted like the hallucinogenic drugs, creating an inner image of almost photographic authenticity. Even the curry had been part of the system of fantasy.

Elliott wandered ruminatively around the lounge, listening to the rain sweep like hail across the windows. Within a few moments he knew that more of these hallucinatory memories lay below the surface of his mind, all revolving around the identity of the missing Indian doctor.

Unable to dispel them, he deliberately let himself drift off into a reverie. Perhaps the association of the funereal rain and the tiresome pain below his sternum was responsible for the

gathering sense of foreboding in his mind. Formless ideas rose towards consciousness, and he stirred uneasily in his chair. Without realizing it, he found himself thinking of his wife's death, an event shrouded in pain and a peculiar dream-like violence. For a moment he was almost inside his wife's dying mind, at the bottom of an immense drowned lake, separated from the distant pinpoint of sky by enormous volumes of water that pressed upon his chest. . . .

IN a flood of sweat, Elliott awoke from this nightmare, the whole tragic vision of his wife's death before his eyes. Judith was alive, of course, staying with her married sister at the beach-house near Worthing, but the vision of her drowning had come through with the force and urgency of a telepathic signal.

"Judith!"

Rousing himself, Elliott hurried to the telephone in the hall. Something about its psychological dimensions convinced him that he had not imagined the death scene.

The sea!

He snatched up the phone, dialing for the operator. At that very moment Judith might well be swimming alone while her sister prepared tea with the children, in sight of the beach but unaware she was in danger. . . .

THE SUDDEN AFTERNOON

"Operator, this is urgent." Elliott began. "I must talk to my wife, I think she's in some sort of danger. Can you get me Calcutta 30331."

The operator hesitated. "Calcutta? I'm sorry, caller, I'll transfer you to Overseas—"

"What? I don't want—" Elliott stopped. "What number did I ask for?"

"Calcutta 30331. I'll have you transferred."

"Wait!" Elliott steadied himself against the window. The rain beat across the glazed panes. "My mistake. I meant Worthing 303—"

"Are you there, caller? Worthing Three Zero Three—" Her voice waited.

Wearily Elliott lowered the telephone. "I'll look it up," he said thickly. "That wasn't the number."

He turned the pages of the memo pad, realizing that both he and Judith had known the number for years and never bothered to record it.

"Are you there, caller?" The operator's voice was sharper.

A few moments later, when he was connected to Directory Inquiries, Elliott realized that he had also forgotten his sister-in-law's name and address.

CALCUTTA 30331." Elliott repeated the number as he poured himself a drink from the

whisky decanter. Pulling himself together, he recognized that the notion of a telepathic message was fatuous. Judith would be perfectly safe, on her way back to London with the children, and he had misinterpreted the vision of the dying woman. The telephone number, however, remained. The enigmatic sequence flowed off his tongue with the unconscious familiarity of long usage. A score of similar memories waited to be summoned into reality, as if a fugitive mind had taken up residence in his brain.

He picked the newspaper off the floor.

. . . Dr. Krishnamurti Singh. Scotland Yard believe he may be able to assist them in their inquiries . . .

'Assist them in their inquiries'—a typical Fleet Street euphemism, part of the elaborate code build up between the newspapers and their readers. A French paper, not handicapped by the English libel laws, would be shouting 'Bluebeard! Assassin!'

Detectives are at the bedside of Mrs. Ethel Burgess, the charwoman employed by Dr. and Mrs. Singh, who was yesterday found unconscious at the foot of the stairs. . . .

Mrs. Burgess! Instantly an image of the small elderly woman, with a face like a wizened apple, came before his eyes. She was lying in the hospital bed at the Middlesex, watching him with frightened reproachful glances—

The tumbler, half-filled with whisky, smashed itself on the fireplace tiles. Elliott stared at the fragments of wet glass around his feet, then set down in the center of the sofa with his head in his hands, trying to hold back the flood of memories. Helplessly he found himself thinking of the medical school at Calcutta. The half-familiar faces of fellow students passed in a blur. He remembered his passionate interest in developing a scientific approach to the obscurer branches of yoga and the Hindu parapsychologies, the student society he formed and its experiments in thought and body transference, brought to an end by the death of one of the students and the subsequent scandal. . . .

For a moment Elliott marvelled at the coherence and convincing detail of the memories. Numbly he reminded himself that in fact he had been a chemistry student at—

Where?

With a start he realized that he had forgotten. Quickly he searched his mind, and found he could remember almost nothing

of his distant past, where he was born, his parents and childhood. Instead he saw once again, this time with luminous clarity, the rowing-boat on the crimson Ganges and its dark oarsman watching him with his ambiguous smile. Then he saw another picture, of himself as a small boy, writing in a huge ledger in which all the pencilled entries had been laboriously rubbed out, sitting at a desk in a room with a low ceiling of bamboo rods over his father's warehouse by the market—

"Nonsense!" Flinging the memory from him, with all its tender associations, Elliott stood up restlessly, his heart racing with a sudden fever. His forehead burned with heat, his mind inventing strings of fantasies around the Dr. Singh wanted by the police. He felt his pulse, then leaned into the mirror over the mantelpiece and examined his eyes, checking his pupil reflexes with expert fingers for any symptoms of concussion.

Swallowing with a dry tongue, he stared down at the physician's hands which had examined him, then decided to call his own doctor. A sedative, an hour's sleep, and he would recover.

In the falling evening light he could barely see the numerals. "Hello, hello!" he shouted. "Is anyone there?"

"Yes, Dr. Singh," a woman replied. "Is that you?"

Frightened, Elliott cupped his hand over the mouthpiece. He had dialled the number from memory, but from an other memory than his own. But not only had the receptionist recognized his voice—Elliott had recognized her's, and knew her name.

Experimentally he lifted the receiver, and said the name in his mind. "Miss Tremayne—?"

"Dr. Singh? Are you—?"

With an effort Elliott made his voice more guttural. "I'm sorry, I have the wrong number. What is your number?"

The girl hesitated. When she spoke the modulation and rhythm of her voice were again instantly familiar. "This is Harley Street 30331," she said cautiously. "Dr. Singh, the police have—"

Elliott lowered the telephone into its cradle. Wearily he sat down on the carpet in the darkness, looking up at the black rectangle of the front door. Again the headache began to drum at his temples, as he tried to ignore the memories crowding into his mind. Above him the staircase led to another world.

HALF an hour later, he pulled himself to his feet. Searching for his bed, and fearing the light, he stumbled into a room and lay down. With a start he clambered upright, and found that he was lying on the table in the dining room.

He had forgotten his way around the house, and the topography of another home, apparently a single-story apartment, had superimposed itself upon his mind. In the strange upstairs floor he found an untidy nursery full of children's toys and clothes, an unremembered frieze of childish drawings which showed tranquil skies over church steeples. When he closed the door the scene vanished like a forgotten tableau.

In the bedroom next door a portrait photograph stood on the dressing table, showing the face of a pleasant blond-haired woman he had never seen. He gazed down at the bed in the darkness, the wardrobes and mirrors around him like the furniture of a dream.

"Ramadya, Ramadya," he murmured, on his lips the name of the dying woman.

The telephone rang. Standing in the darkness at the top of the stairs, he listened to its sounds shrilling through the silent house. He walked down to it with leaden feet.

"Yes?" he said tersely.

"Hello, darling," a woman's bright voice answered. In the background trains shunted and whistled. "Hello? Is that Hampstead—"

"This is Harley Street 30331," he said quickly. "You have the wrong number."

"Oh, dear, I am sorry, I thought—"

Cutting off this voice, which for a fleeting moment had drawn together the fragmented persona clinging to the back of his mind, he stood at the window by the front door. Through the narrow barred pane he could see that the rain had almost ended, and a light mist hung among the trees. The bedraggled figure on the bench still maintained his vigil, his face hidden in the darkness. Now and then his drenched form would glimmer in the passing lights.

For some reason a sense of extreme urgency had overtaken Eliott. He knew that there were a series of tasks to be performed, records to be made before important evidence vanished, reliable witnesses to be contacted. A hundred ignored images passed through his mind as he searched for a pair of shoes and a jacket in the cupboard upstairs, scenes of his medical practice, a woman patient being tested by an electroencephalogram, the radiator of a Bentley car and its automobile club badges. There were glimpses of the streets near Harley Street, the residue of countless journeys to and from the consulting rooms, the entrance to the Overseas Club, a noisy seminar at one of the scientific institutes where someone was shouting at him theatrically.

Then, unpleasantly, there were feelings of remorse for his wife's death, counterbalanced by the growing inner conviction that this, paradoxically, was the only way to save her, to force her to a new life. In a strange yet familiar voice he heard himself saying: 'the soul, like any soft-skinned creature, clings to whatever shell it can find. Only by cracking that shell can one force it to move to a new . . .'

ATTACKS of vertigo came over him in waves as he descended the staircase. There was someone he must find, one man whose help might save him. He picked up the telephone and dialled, swaying giddily from side to side.

A clipped voice like polished ivory answered. "Professor Ramachandran speaking."

"Professor—"

"Hello? Who is that, please?"

He cleared his throat, coughing noisily into the mouthpiece. "Professor, understand me! It was the tumor, inoperable, it was the only way to save her—metempsychosis of the somatic function as well as the psychic. . . ." He had launched into a semi-coherent tirade, the words coming out in clotted shreds. "Ramadya has gone over now, she is the other woman . . . neither she nor any others will ever know. . . . Professor, will you

tell her one day, and myself . . . a single word—"

"Dr. Singh!" The voice at the other end was a shout. "I can no longer help you! You must take the consequences of your folly! I warned you repeatedly about the danger of your experiments—"

The telephone squeaked on the floor where he dropped it. Outside the headlamps of police cars flashed by, their blue roof lights revolving like spectral beacons. As he unlatched the door and stepped out into the cold night air he had a last obsessive thought, of a fair-haired, middle-aged man with glasses who was a chemist at a cancer institute, a man with a remarkably receptive mind, its open bowl spread before him like a huge dish antenna. This man alone could help him. His name was—Elliott.

AS he sat on the bench he saw the lights approaching him through the trees, like glowing aureoles in the darkness. The rain had ended and a light mist dissipated under the branches, but after the warmth indoors it was colder than he expected, and within only a few minutes in the park he began to shiver. Walking between the trees, he saw the line of police cars parked along the perimeter road two hundred yards away. Whichever way he moved, the lights seemed to draw

nearer, although never coming directly towards him.

He turned, deciding to return to the house, and to his surprise saw a slim fair-haired man cross the road from the park and climb the steps to the front door. Startled, he watched this intruder disappear through the open door and close it behind him.

Then two policemen stepped from the mist on his right, their torches dazzling his eyes. He broke into a run, but a third huge figure materialized from behind a trunk and blocked his path.

"That's enough then," a gruff voice told him as he wrestled helplessly. "Let's try to take it quietly."

Lamps circled the darkness. More police ran over through the trees. An inspector with silver shoulder badges stepped up and peered into his face as a constable raised a torch.

"Dr. Singh?"

For a moment he listened to the sounds of the name, which had pursued him all day, hang fleetingly on the damp air. Most of his mind seemed willing to accept the identification, but a small part, now dissolving to a minute speck, like the faint stars veiled by the mist, refused to agree, knowing that whoever he was now, he had once not been Dr. Singh.

"No!" He shook his head, and with a galvanic effort managed

to wrench loose one arm. He was seized at the shoulder and raised his free arm to shield himself from the lights and the pressing faces.

His glasses had fallen off and been trampled underfoot, but he could see more clearly without them. He looked at his hand. Even in the pale light the darker pigmentation was plain. His fingers were small and neat, an unfamiliar scar marking one of the knuckles.

Then he felt the small goatee beard on his chin.

Inside his mind the last island of resistance slid away into the dark unremembered past.

"Dr. Krishnamurti Singh," the inspector stated.

AMONG the suitcases in the doorway Judith Elliott watched the police cars drive away towards Hampstead village. Upstairs the two children romped about in the nursery.

"How horrid! I'm glad the children didn't see him arrested. He was struggling like an animal."

Elliott paid off the taxi-driver and then closed the door. "Who was it, by the way? No one we know, I hope?"

Judith glanced around the hall, and noticed the telephone receiver on the floor. She bent down and replaced it. "The taxi-driver said it was some Harley Street

psychiatrist. An Indian doctor. Apparently he strangled his wife in the bath. The strange thing is she was already dying of a brain tumor."

Elliott grimaced. "Gruesome. Perhaps he was trying to save her pain."

"By strangling her fully conscious? A typical masculine notion, darling."

Elliott laughed as they strolled into the lounge. "Well, my dear, did you have a good time? How was Molly?"

"She was fine. We had a great time together. Missed you, of course. I felt a bit off-color yesterday, got knocked over by a big wave and swallowed a lot of water." She hesitated, looking through the window at the park. "You know, it's rather funny, but twenty minutes ago I tried to ring you from the station and got a Harley Street number by mistake. I spoke to an Indian. He sounded rather like a doctor."

Elliott grinned. "Probably the same man."

"That's what I thought. But he couldn't have got from Harley Street to Hampstead so quickly, could he? The driver said the police have been looking for him here all afternoon."

"Maybe they've got the wrong man. Unless there are two Dr. Singh's." Elliott snapped his fingers. "That's odd, where did I get the name? Must have read about him in the papers."

Judith nodded, coming over to him. "It was in this morning's." She took off her hat and placed it on the mantelpiece. "Indians are strange people. I don't know why, but yesterday when I was getting over my wave I was thinking about an Indian girl I knew once. All I can remember is her name. Ramadya. I think she was drowned. She was very sweet and pretty."

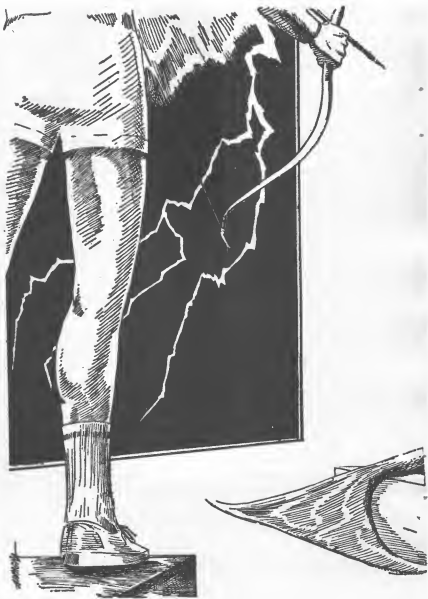
"Like you." Elliott put his hands around her waist, but Judith pointed to the broken glass in the fireplace.

"I say, I can see I've been away." With a laugh she put her hands on his shoulders and squeezed him, then drew away in alarm.

"Darling, where did you get this peculiar suit? For heaven's sake, look!" She squeezed his jacket, and the water poured from her fingers as from a wet sponge. "You're soaked through! Where on earth have you been all day?"

THE END





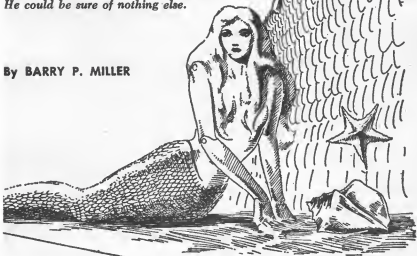
The Mermaid and the Archer

There were only three certainties in his simple life:

- 1) the fact that he existed*
- 2) the fact that he could perceive*
- 3) the fact he was utterly immobile*

He could be sure of nothing else.

By BARRY P. MILLER



Illustrator ADRAGNA

HE possessed no symbology with which to interpret the objects of his perception. He could only wonder about them. He wondered why there was a transparent barrier in front of him. He wondered about the markings on it:

SPORTING GOODS

He wondered about all the things he saw beyond the barrier. He wondered why the sky was sometimes blue, sometimes grey, sometimes black and sprinkled with tiny lights. But most of all, he wondered who he was and how he had come to be.

His earliest memories were dominated by a face. He had no way of knowing it was an old face, lined and weatherbeaten, or that its clear blue eyes were filled with a strange commingling of sorrow and love. He did know that his memories of the face disturbed him profoundly. The face had passed out of his life, leaving a hollowness for which he had no name.

Regularity had come into his life with the passing of the face. There were times when whiteness fell from somber skies. He would be bundled into bulky garments, and long wooden things would be fastened to his lower extremities. When the whiteness turned to wetness and the light of day lingered longer in heaven, high rubber boots would be put on him and a pole-like affair with a reel

and cord would be fixed in his hands. Then the season of the sun would arrive, and a stick bowed by taut twine would be placed in his hand, crossed by a feathered wooden shaft tipped with steel. The routine never changed. He had no way of counting how many of its long cycles he had been through. He could only watch the throngs that bustled at regular hours beyond the transparent barrier while his life stretched out into a span of impotent wondering. If he could have chosen a word to describe his condition, the word would have been loneliness.

A SEASON of the sun came, and his life was changed. He was stripped of his boots, pole and reel. Bright new attire was put on him and the bow and shaft were fixed in his grip. He was moved around in the process. When the adjustments to him were completed, he found that his immobile eyes were gazing directly into another pair of eyes.

They were a deep and luminous green. If he had ever seen the sea, those eyes would have caused him to think of the sea. They were set in a pale oval face framed by long waves of platinum hair. He needed no words to know that the face was beautiful.

The face was upheld by a neck as an ivory column that was joined to a lithe, graceful torso.

Halfway down the torso was transformed into a shape outside all his experience. He had never seen a fish. But the newness of what he was seeing did not alter his initial wordless impression of beauty.

With the edges of his immovable vision, he could see the objects that surrounded her. There were pairs of webbed elongated things. There were cylinders and hoses. There were long spear-like things with straps and cord. A feeling deep within him seemed to tell him that these objects were out of place in dryness, in air.

He swiftly returned to rapt contemplation of those luminous green eyes staring so directly into his. Long ago he had known something that might be called happiness, in the days of the lined old face with the clear blue eyes. The memory of it had nearly faded. Now happiness was being reborn in him. But a discomfort which a man might have called anxiety was being born along with it.

The anxiety came from those green eyes into which he stared so steadily. They seemed to be pools filled with dark flitting forms of urgency. Dimly within his voiceless being, the idea of a loneliness other than his which was greater than his was taking shape. It aroused a troubled wonder in him. Were there others as himself, immobile ones, lonely

ones, standing stiffly forever behind their transparent barriers and staring with unblinking eyes at the world without?

He wanted desperately to ask the owner of those wondrous eyes, *Are you such a one?* But even if he had possessed the words to clothe the concept in symbolic form, he lacked the motility to send the message on its way. His growing awareness of his impotence became his first insight into the nature of despair.

HE ached with that insight while, beyond the transparent barrier, the sun sank behind buildings in the west and the heavens turned from blue and fleecy white to a riot of crimson and gold. It was the time of day when the throngs beyond the barrier swarmed most thickly. Presently the throngs thinned, and darkness flowed as some intangible tide through the streets. The advent of dusk filled him with a concern he had never felt before. The thickening dimness was veiling those eyes which had brought him such strange joys, such odd pains.

Before the dusk deepened into true night, the street-lights came on. Their soft yellow glow made she whom he beheld even more an object of mystery and wonder than she had been throughout the day. Her urgency and her beauty had been heightened so that it

was almost more than he could bear to look at her. Never in his existence had he known such turmoil. Then the wordless thought occurred to him, *Is she as distressed as me?*

It was terrible for him to think of her suffering from an inner upheaval such as his. He wanted overwhelmingly to be of comfort to her. His powerlessness was now more intolerable than the sum of the day's anxiety. He could not know that he loved, but he was enduring some of the pains that love can cause.

The sight of her, the acute consciousness of her, was filling all his horizons. She lay motionless and alone in the street-light's glow, her hair a pale silver cloud, her face half in concealing shadow, her eyes shining as if energized by some huge desperate emotion burning beyond them.

The loneliness and urgency churning inside him did not seem to be entirely his own. Some of that agitation seemed to belong to Another. Stirrings and murmurings came to him from both without and within. He did not understand them; he could not respond to them. At his lack of response, they seemed to withdraw into a darkness, a pain. He did not want them to go away. It was as if they were a fragile connection with a strange and intense Other. He had no way to

tell them to come back. He could not strain after them with his body, so he strained after them with his soul.

Suddenly the Otherness was all around him. It was warmth and goodness. It was coming from her. It *was* her! She caused great joyous throbbings and chimings to reverberate through his soul. He acknowledged the fact of her presence with a surge of raw wordless happiness. It was as if an awful hollowness in him, a core of incessant hungering, had suddenly been filled. He gave himself up completely to the greatest joy he had ever known.

The high pallid pastels of approaching dawn were staining the eastern skies before he came enough out of his joy to direct a voiceless querying at the Other. He was tentative and anxious. He wanted to ask her, *Who are you?* But he had no language with which to frame the thought. Would she understand him?

He was enveloped in her compassion. She understood. She created pealings in his soul and associated them with herself. If he could have understood speech, those pealings would have been a silvery voice saying, *I am the Mermaid.*

She saw that he did not understand. She tried to reassure him. She created an image of herself in his soul and made it smile. But he did not know what a smile was,

He waited in eagerness and wonder for her to do more. She was not daunted. With an eagerness to match his, she tackled the task of building up in his spirit the complex symbology which, in terms of print or sound, is human language.

His education had finally begun.

HE learned quickly. Physically they were little more than wood and fiber and metal. They had no need for sleep. They remained in constant mental communion. By concentrating her whole attention upon him, inspired by a wealth of love, she gave him the gift of language in less than a month.

She told him her story. She had come into being many years ago, in a far-away land across the sea. He had no idea of the sea. She showed him its image in her memory, the huge splendid sweep of surging water under a tall clear sky. He was enthralled and amazed. He told her that her eyes were the color of the sea. She gave him a smile of her spirit and went on with her story.

Her first memories were of a kindly middle-aged man with vital blue eyes. She showed him the image in her memory. He was filled with wonder. That face and those eyes belonged to the same man who haunted his own memories. Only, in his memories, they

seemed older. He told her. She said she was not surprised.

She had been a puppet, she explained. She told him what a puppet was. The man with the vital blue eyes had been a puppet master. He had made her with care and love. With the same care and love, he had made her perform in exquisite little fantasies before rapt audiences. It had been a very happy time for her. She had loved being made to perform. She had loved the admiration his small audiences of children and adults had felt for her. She had learned the intricacies of language when her master would sometimes talk to her, in the lonelier hours of the night. His secret sadness was that his wife had died. His puppets were his chief consolation, and of all his creations he was most proud of her.

Then a time of evil had come. Fire and thunder had fallen screaming from the skies. Men with the grimmest faces she had ever seen came marching through the streets. The blue eyes of her master had clouded over with a sickness obviously of the soul as he beheld the ruin of much that he held dear. He had not been able to endure it. He had fled across the breadth of the sea with his puppets.

In the new land, he learned to his sorrow that people were not much interested in puppets. They

were too busy with the war. He endured many lean days, and sometimes had no place to sleep nights. But he did make a few new friends, and they tried to help him by suggesting he apply his talents to something other than puppetry. He found work with a place that made store-window mannikins. All his funds ran out before his first paycheck was due. He brought her, his most cherished creation, to his place of work and asked if he could have money for her. He was paid a small sum for her. In the years that followed she never saw him again. Her loneliness had been great. She concluded by saying, *I dread to think how much greater it might have become if it were not for you.*

One thing bothers me, he said. We are made from materials that are not living. Why can we see, and feel, and think? What are we?

I do not know, she said. I can only guess. He who made us loved his work with all his soul. Once he said that a true artist tries to put his soul into his work. We may have grown into what we are from bits of his soul.

He thought about that for a while. At last he said, *He named you Mermaid. I think he had a name for me when he was making me. I cannot remember it. Wonder what it was.*

We'll probably never know, she

said. He called me Mermaid because that's what I am. You're a store window dummy. But Dummy doesn't seem right.

I think I'm also called a mannikin, he said.

Mannikin doesn't feel right either, she answered.

Must I stay nameless?

No. You're holding a bow and arrow. Archer is a common name. I'll call you Archer.

He said, *I don't always have the bow and arrow. Summer is going away. Soon they will dress me up for winter. Dread went through him. What if they put you away?*

Her thought quivered with fear. *Don't think of it. Let's just be glad that we have each other even if it is only for a little while.*

IT was not easy to avoid thinking of how they might be separated. Sometimes it cast a pall over them like the pall the August thunderheads would cast over the city before giving monstrous birth to torrents and lightning and rolling thunder. Sometimes it drove them to find things they could share with each other within the limited range of their perception. From the corners of their eyes they would watch the pale beauty of a clear day's dawning with mute appreciation. Or they would speculate with each other about the causes of the ecstasies or sorrows on the face of people who peered in at them.

Not too many people looked at them. The throngs were always hurrying. Those who did stop to look were mostly oldsters or wide-eyed children. There were exceptions. Late one night a drunken man staggered against the shop front. His clothes were expensive but disheveled. He put his hands on the window to steady himself, and saw the Mermaid. He stiffened and stared for a long time. Finally he gasped, "Jeanne!" and broke into muffled crying. He lurched off into the night, still crying.

The Archer was disturbed. *The sight of you caused him pain. How can that be?*

The world is full of mysteries, she said, and not all of them are happy. I fear I reminded him of someone he has lost.

Then they realized that once again their talk had led them to the thought of their possible separation, and the sadness of the thought stayed with them the rest of that night. It might have lasted throughout the following day, had not another exception materialized from the world beyond.

There was a thundershower that noon. Lightning writhed across dusky churning heavens. Thunder rattled the store window in its frame. Rain came in such cascades that it drove the throngs off the streets. People took refuge beneath the awning over the storefront, waiting for

the rain to ease. Presently it slacked off, and in ones and twos the people left. All but one.

He was a large man. His hair was unruly and dark, his eyes gray and very alert. He wore an old brown overcoat. His hands stood out in sharp contrast against the dark fabric, and seemed to be too slender and fine to belong to his massive frame. He was studying the Mermaid closely, and talking to himself. The quiet after the storm brought his words to the Mermaid and the Archer: "Who would have dreamed to find such artistry in this part of the city?"

He put his nose to the window to see her better. "You're lovelier than any store window dummy has a right to be," he said. Then he noticed how her joints were articulated. "You're also lovelier than any puppet has a right to be."

The Archer, watching him from the corners of his eyes, felt something a man would have called jealousy. It was a new, a painful emotion for him to feel. It was mixed with pride at having a real person praise the Mermaid's beauty. The Mermaid sensed what he was feeling and folded him in the warmth of her love to reassure him.

Even as she did so, her admirer outside pressed still closer against the window and said, "It's not that platinum mop of

yours that makes you beautiful. It isn't the way you're carved, either. It's your eyes. They ache with a fullness of love. Who do you love?"

He looked around the scene within the window. "You could not be so full of love unless its object were closer," he said. He followed the Mermaid's line of sight with his gaze. He saw the Archer at the same instant that the sun came out from behind the ragged wrack trailing after the storm.

He studied the Archer in musing silence. "You," he said at last. "Yes, you. It has to be you." He let his gaze linger on the bow and arrow. "That's a nasty thing you've got there. Don't you know she loves you? Point that thing somewhere else."

The Archer asked the Mermaid, *What does he mean?*

I didn't explain before because I didn't want to sadden you, she answered. *Bows and arrows are not used for sport. Men have crippled and killed each other with them.*

Is the one I'm holding aimed at you?

Yes.

I wish it weren't.

I know. It's not your fault. fault. Don't worry about it.

The man outside said, "You wish you weren't pointing it at her. You're as full of love for her as she's full of love for you." He

turned his back to them and surveyed the dingy shopfronts across the street, the grey skyscrapers looming beyond, the dissipating tatters of the storm farther beyond.

"This place is dismal and forlorn," he said. He turned and faced them again. "You contrast with it like twin luminaries in a realm of shadow. How's that for poetic metaphor?"

He shook his head. "I'm no poet. I couldn't do you justice with verse, blank or otherwise. But I know what I can do." He reached into a voluminous pocket of his overcoat and withdrew a sketch pad. "I hope I can finish the preliminary sketches by sunset. I'll come back tomorrow to get the colors right. Only oils will bring you to life."

He said no more. He sketched until the sun sank behind the silhouettes of the western skyscrapers and the only light came from the high flaming afterglow.

IT stormed again towards midnight. The Archer saw how the savage glare of the lightning could not make the Mermaid's loveliness harsh. Wind howled between the boomings of the thunder, and drove rain before it with such force that it racketed off the display window. Now and then there came gusts so powerful that the dry old timbers of the shop bent and groaned.

The violence outside aroused somber thoughts in them. *It reminds me of the war across the Sea, long ago*, said the Mermaid.

The Archer was reminded of what he held. He said, *It still hurts me to know that I am aiming an implement of war at you.*

Please don't trouble yourself with such thoughts, she implored.

It is my powerlessness that hurts, he said. *I do not want to point this thing at you. But my will is impotent to turn it aside.*

She tried to soothe him. *That is why you should not let it trouble you. Don't chafe over what you can't help.*

It feels wrong, he insisted. *We are so similar to people. We think and see and feel even as they do. But they can move while we cannot. Is it our lot to be forever impotent, forever immobile?*

She could not sigh with her nonexistent breath, so she sighed with her soul. *They are made of living tissues. We are not. We are only dead dry wood, and cloth, and bits of glass and metal.*

Can seeing, feeling and thinking beings be dead? he argued. *We are such beings. Surely we have life of a sort! It is unthinkable that we should be utterly impotent!*

Please! she begged. *Remember that your pain is mine also.*

It was as if he had not heard her. *Before people can move, they must will themselves to move.*

Somehow their bodies translate the will to motion into actual motion. Our bodies are not the same as theirs. We are alive, nevertheless. Perhaps we too could move if only we willed to firmly enough.

Oh, Archer, she said. *You'll only frustrate yourself.*

Lightning sheeted overhead, turning the storming night into a brief garish parody of day. The sudden light gave the Archer's features a grimness and a determination the Mermaid had never seen before. He said, *Before you came, my loneliness and ignorance were a direct consequence of my impotence. If they put you away with the advent of winter, it will be my impotence that will imprison me in a loneliness infinitely worse for having known you. I cannot bear to think of it. I must will myself to potency.*

She was awed by his insistence, his vehemence. Her love went out to him like some invisible flame. *What will you do?*

First I will point this weapon away from you, he said.

His hand holding the bow was well inside his field of vision. He concentrated upon it. It seemed miles away. He willed it to move. It remained immovable. He had a dim intuition of how a man might feel entombed beneath tons of resisting granite. He thought of the consequences if he remained impotent. *Move*, his

soul screamed at his wooden hand.
Move!

LIGHTNING wove tracteries of pitiless sunfire beneath the driving clouds. In that jumping glare, shadows flew. Had his hand moved, only a little, a little? Had it? Darkness and thunder fell almost simultaneously. It was impossible to tell. Wind roared along the street. The building groaned.

Now the only light came from the streetlamp. It was softened and diffused by crashing volumes of rain. There was just enough to show him the Mermaid. Her hair was a wan ghostly cloud about her. Her eyes were twin green stars whose light seemed to come from the love within. The storm outside was a forerunner of winter. He tried to imagine existence without her.

The unbearableness of his imagining sent him into a frenzy. He concentrated the whole of his spiritual resources upon his hand.
Move.

A gust drove out of the storm that was stronger than any other. The whole shop shook. The Archer's hand seemed to twitch. It was enough! The bow had been fixed in his hand with a minimal tension on the string to achieve a realistic effect. It twanged almost too faintly to be heard above the storm. The arrow was in flight.

There was not much power behind it. But it was a hunting arrow, and its tip was razor-edged and heavy. It ghosted past the Mermaid and lost itself in the shadows beyond her; an instant later, there was a crackling and a flaring of sparks. The steel head had buried itself in an exposed wire.

What happened? asked the Mermaid.

An exultation that approached madness was filling the Archer.
I moved! I moved!

A flickering reddish-orange light was growing in the shadows behind the Mermaid. She could not see it, but a coldness went through her. She said, *Archer, I'm frightened.*

The reddish-orange light swelled into a great bloom of flame. The shorted, overheated wires had set fire to the tinder-dry ancient wood of the shop. The glow of the flames illumined both the Mermaid and the Archer. *What is it?* he asked.

I saw it during the war. It is fire. It is terrible.

What will it do?

If it spreads, it will destroy us, she answered.

Mermaid, he said.

She sensed a strangeness in his thought. *Yes?*

I think I caused the fire.

How?

With the arrow, he said. *It flew away from me into darkness.*

There was a flash of light. The fire is growing out of where the arrow went.

The floor was ablaze. Tongues of fire were creeping toward the Mermaid. She felt the Archer's thoughts dissolve into anguish. *Oh, Mermaid! I wanted to find some way to keep us together! I have destroyed us!*

I love you, Archer. I do not blame you. How could you possibly have foreseen what would happen?

The flames no longer crackled. They roared. They reared over the Mermaid. They were so close that their heat was causing the fabric of her tail to smoke and char. The Archer knew the meaning of horror as he became aware that no power of his could avert the doom that was upon her.

Her eyes were calm. Filaments of flame curled, almost tenderly, around her face. But they were without compassion. Her hair as pale and cool as the light of stars was darkening, darkening and smouldering, and her painted skin was charring . . . and suddenly she was the center of a column of flame, and her grave beautiful eyes were the only parts of her that were not burning; they still looked into his own, full with a love he could no longer endure, telling him, *It doesn't hurt. I cannot feel physical pain. It is the knowledge that*

we are losing each other which sears me.

Her blackened form flared one last time then crumbled into ashy ruin. He groped in an absence, an emptiness, where before he had felt the warmth of her presence. *She is gone.*

The knowledge was so dreadful that, if he had had a flesh and blood brain, he would have gone mad. He was dimly aware through the dullness of his despair that he was surrounded by fire. The string of his bow was smoking. A tongue of flame licked up in front of his eyes. A chaos of moving, malevolent brightness was all he could see. Far away a wall of darkness appeared. It grew and grew until all else was lost, for ever.

* * *

In the loneliness of a bare studio, an artist worked for long weeks, painting. Once he said, "Such love should not pass from the earth."

The darkness was riven with light, and he held a miracle in his arms. *Mermaid!*

Oh, Archer!

No one could look at the painting without being deeply moved. All who saw it were haunted long afterward both awake and in dreams by the remembrance of a joy which passed all understanding.

THE END

Frobisher had a reputation as a suicide planet. But the mutineers never really knew what metamorphoses took place beneath the barrier layers.



I WANT you to handle it yourself,' Captain Vindall said firmly.

Paton stirred uneasily in his chair. But he said: "If that's what you want, sir—"

"It is what I want. These men have to get hung, Frank. If by some chance they got off, the Space Navy's scouting program would be finished. For that matter the Space Navy would be just about finished. No Navy can ever afford to have any sympathy with mutineers. How can you run a Navy when nobody has to obey any orders he doesn't feel like obeying?"

"Still, there are certain features about this case, sir—"

PLANET OF CHANGE

By J. T. McINTOSH

Illustrator ADRAGNA



"Hell, Frank, I'm the legal officer and I've got the inquiry findings right here." Vindall picked up a buff-colored folder, lifted it nine inches off his leather-topped desk, and let it drop with a bang. Half a dozen loose papers sideslipped to the floor. "I know all the features about this case. None of them can alter the fact that the captain of the *Mirror* took his ship to Frobisher and when he gave the order to land, his officers and the crew mutinied."

"That's true," Paton admitted, "as far as it goes. But it wasn't a mutiny in the ordinary sense. The captain wasn't relieved or restrained. . . . He brought his ship back and the return trip was like any other trip. The only order of his that was not obeyed was the order to land on Frobisher."

"Does that make it any better, for God's sake? A perfectly normal, efficient captain with no blot on his record takes the *Mirror* half across the galaxy. When he reaches his destination, the officers decide they're not going to land. The crew backs them and there's nothing the captain can do but come home again. Do you know how many million dollars it cost to send the *Mirror* to Frobisher?"

"I know, sir. But frankly, I'd rather defend Simpson and the others than prosecute."

"Too bad," said Vindall. "I've got Winterset for the defense."

Paton blinked. "Winterset? Sir, may I say something?"

"Of course."

"If I'm judge advocate and Winterset is defense counsel, there are going to be a lot of people saying that this court martial is rigged."

From the calm way in which he took this, the suggestion was no surprise to the legal officer. "Why, Frank?" he said mildly. "What's wrong with Winterset?"

"He's such a hot shot on naval tradition that he won't put up more than a token defense. I'm only guessing, but if you got him to agree to defend those men you must have told him it was his duty, practically ordered him to do it. . . . He must be as eager to speak for them as they were to land on Frobisher."

"Except that Winterset is going to do his duty and those men didn't."

"Is he going to do his duty, sir? There are half a dozen points he can make that I'd have a heck of a job to nullify. But will he make them? Winterset, who was entered for the Naval Academy the moment his proud parents learned he wasn't a girl?"

"Yet he studied law," Vindall observed pensively.

"Only when he knew his health was going to keep him out of space-going ships, sir."

Vindall leaned forward across his desk. "Listen, Frank, as society in general gets softer and softer and things that were luxuries twenty years ago become accepted as necessities, civilians think they have a right to squeal at the smallest, slightest restrictions—but the Navy still has to have discipline, and discipline means blind, unquestioning obedience even of muddle-headed or sadistic orders. Now, Captan Brown never gave orders like that. He's not only one of the most efficient lieutenant commanders in the Navy, he's also one of the most popular."

"Still, sir, we're not at war. That's fundamental in this case. In war, the officers of the *Mirror* or any other ship would have had to obey an order they knew meant certain death for all of them. Everybody accepts that. But in peacetime—"

"Frank, out in deep space the Navy is *always* at war. Umpteen light-years from base, the captain of any ship has to have all the authority any captain ever had in any war in history—more, because he can't hope for orders or advice. He's *got* to complete his mission somehow, he's got to do something, right or wrong. When he comes back and reports what he's done, the Navy leans over backwards to support his actions—because out there he's not just a lieutenant command-

er or even an admiral, he's the Navy itself."

Paton hesitated, and then nodded. It was no use arguing any more. For that matter, it had never been any use arguing. The Navy had no choice but to back Captain Brown to the hilt and clamp down hard on Lieutenant David Simpson and the rest. Simpson himself, being an officer with twenty years' experience, must have been fully aware of this all along.

The Navy didn't hand out medals to execs who acted as Simpson had done. Even if Simpson got off, he didn't really get off. Would the Navy ever give a command to a man who had rejected the Navy's right to command?

DAVID SIMPSON was the coolest man present as the members of the court were sworn in. He was a huge man, burly yet surprisingly light on his feet. But for his eyes he looked stupid, an unthinking, impulsive man of action. His eyes, however, were deep as wells, eternally watching, assessing.

The other thing about him which was surprising was his age. Even the most senior space-going naval officers had to be young—the physical stresses of space demanded youth. At Simpson's age, forty-two, he might well have been a captain or an ordinary sailor. Finding him

an exec raised two automatic questions in naval minds. *What kept him out of command? How did he climb to be executive officer?*

Frank Paton took a good look at David Simpson, tried to assess him and failed. It didn't seem to worry Simpson the least little bit that he was on trial alone.

At the time, of course, the officers and crew of the naval exploration ship *Mirror* had taken considerable trouble to present a united front. The refusal to land on Frobisher had not been delivered to Captain Brown as an act of insubordination of one man or even of several men: officers and crew had stood together and said *We will not*.

The Navy, however, naturally enough brought the exec to trial first. On what happened in Simpson's court martial would depend what action was taken against the other officers and the crew.

One reason why Simpson was not unduly worried, Paton thought shrewdly, might be that every witness from the *Mirror*, with the exception of Lieutenant Commander Peter Brown, could be assumed to be solidly on Simpson's side. If he got off, they got off. If he was guilty, they were guilty.

Beside Simpson, Stephen Winterset looked as if he would rather be anywhere else. He was a tall, stooping lieutenant com-

mander whose family tradition might well have forced him to become a great naval hero—but for the unfortunate fact that a weak chest prevented him from being anything more than an office admiral, if that.

When the legal formalities were concluded and the president of the court, a white-haired captain who was old enough to have served in rocket ships, had signified that the judge advocate could start to present his case, Frank Paton called Lieutenant Commander Peter Silverman Brown.

Paton watched Simpson as Brown entered. The exec betrayed nothing but polite interest as Brown entered and took his seat on the dais in the center of the room.

Brown was forty, rather small, with a quiet but firm manner. He looked as if he was used to being in full command of any situation. He did not look like the kind of captain whose crew would flatly refuse to obey him. But he did look like the kind of captain who, even after such a crisis, would be able to reassert his authority and bring his ship home in good order: the kind of man who would never allow a retreat to become a rout.

"Commander," said Paton, "what were your orders when the *Mirror* blasted off on April 23, 2153?"

"I was to proceed to Frobisher, in the Seefarne system, and land an exploration party there." . .

The captain's voice was resonant and firm. When he looked at Simpson there was faint surprise in his expression, as through he could still scarcely believe that he and Simpson could be facing each other in such circumstances.

"Were you to lead the exploration party personally, sir?" Paton asked.

"No. I was to remain on board my ship."

"Were you, in fact, expressly forbidden to land?"

"I was."

THERE was a slight stir in court. The judge advocate was opening his case as if he was defending Simpson, not prosecuting him.

"You were not to land personally in any circumstances?"

"I was not."

"Who then was to lead the landing party?"

"It was left to my discretion."

"Whom did you eventually appoint to lead the landing party?"

"My executive officer, Lieutenant Simpson."

Paton paused for a moment. The natural thing to do now would be to ask why Brown had chosen his exec and bring out evidence that made the mutiny as heinous as possible.

Instead Paton went back to Brown's orders. "Were your orders secret, commander?"

The captain hesitated slightly and looked at Captain Merchant, the president. Merchant said nothing.

"I'll rephrase the question," Paton said. "Were you to inform your officers of your destination?"

"They knew we were bound for the Seefarne system. Naturally."

"Did they know the ship was bound for Frobisher?"

Brown looked at the president again. The president looked at the defense counsel, who was looking at his boots.

"No," said Brown.

"What did they know, then, or have reason to believe?"

"My orders," said Brown, realizing there was no help for it, "were to inform the ship's company that we were to explore the southern hemisphere of the planet Magellan."

"The fourth planet of the Seefarne system, Frobisher being the third?"

"That is correct."

"Why were you to do this, commander?"

Merchant leaned forward. "The court," he said, "would like the judge advocate to explain this line of questioning."

"Sir," said Paton, "although it is no part of my tactics to antici-

pate the defense, I would like the somewhat peculiar nature of the *Mirror's* mission to go on record at the outset. Commander Brown has already testified that his orders were to mislead the entire ship's company about the nature of his mission. These being his orders, I think it is only fair to Commander Brown, as well as to the accused, to clarify the position before proceeding."

"You may proceed," said Merchant, leaning back.

Paton turned back to Brown. "Why, commander, were you to mislead the ship's company?"

"Because," said Brown, "there would be no trouble about exploring Magellan. But there might be trouble about exploring Frobisher."

"This, then, was known before you started?"

"Yes."

"What was the point of deception, when eventually you had to tell your men that Frobisher was the real destination?"

"It's a long trip. At least there would be no trouble on the way out."

"I want to turn now to the history of Frobisher. Captain—"

Merchant said: "If the judge advocate wants to introduce evidence about previous expeditions to Frobisher, the court presumes he will call independent witnesses?"

"To save time," Paton said,

"I'd like to question the present witness, if the defense has no objection. I only want to establish the general picture."

WINTERSET rose, unfolding himself slowly and painfully. "Defense has no objection," he said. Then he folded himself up again.

"Briefly, commander," Paton said, "what is the history of exploration of Frobisher?"

"Magellan, a Terran-type world, was colonized fifty years ago," Brown said. At first reluctant to cooperate in this line of questioning, he had apparently decided that it all had to come out. "A brief visit to Frobisher at that time showed it to be an inhospitable jungle world, too hot to be suitable for human habitation except at the poles. Large and savage animals abounded and the bacteriological life was dense and dangerous. Since Magellan offered no such problems, colonization of the system was at first confined to one world."

"At first, commander?"

"Correction," said Brown. "Colonization has remained confined to Magellan. No subsequent landing party has ever left Frobisher."

"You mean parties have landed but have not been able to take off again?"

"Exactly. Two civilian and two naval exploration teams have

since gone down in small ships, leaving a parent ship in orbit. Nobody returned."

"But the landing parties must have had radio contact with the parent ship?"

"No. Frobisher's layers stop all incoming and outgoing radio waves. They also to a large extent block radar. So there has been no contact whatever with any member of the last four landing parties from the moment the ships disappeared from sight."

"Thank you, commander. These facts are well known throughout the Space Navy?"

"I wouldn't say well known. The galaxy is vast, and landings have been made on hundreds of worlds. But anyone going to that area would be able to find out what I've told you, and more."

"So the Navy expected trouble, is that so?"

"Yes."

"And you, commander? Did you expect trouble?"

"No," said Brown firmly. "I was in command of a naval exploration ship. If I'd been told to land on Jupiter I would have done so . . ."

"But in this case you were not allowed to land, you were to appoint someone else. What was your reaction when your men refused to land, commander?"

Winterset unfolded himself again, more quickly this time. "Objection," he said. "The judge

advocate seems to be avoiding the incident which led to this trial. He's going all round it."

"If I may be allowed to conclude this line of questioning,"



Paton said, "I'll go at once to the main event."

"Proceed," Merchant said.

Paton repeated his question.

"I wanted to land myself," Brown said.

"Despite your express orders to the contrary?"

"First things first. My mission was to explore Frobisher. If my men refused to land, it was my duty to do myself what they refused to do."

"And what happened when you tried to land?"

"No one would accompany me. And it is impossible to land a space launch alone."

"So you were forced to abandon your plan to land yourself?"

"Yes."

PATON then turned to the actual mutiny. The facts were simple: when Brown put his ship into orbit around Frobisher and briefed his officers, they refused in a body to obey any order relating to landing, though obeying all others.

"What was their manner, commander?"

"Respectful and regretful. They said that landing meant certain death. They asked me to withdraw my order."

"And what did you do?"

"Insisted that we land."

"Thank you, commander. No more questions."

Again the court was taken by

surprise. The judge advocate had given the appearance of being engaged in a lengthy examination of the witness. His abrupt closure brought a frown to Merchant's face.

"The court will be cleared," the president said.

When Brown, Simpson and Winterset had been led out by an orderly, Merchant looked hard at Paton and said: "The court does not wish you to present your closing statement now, but some explanation seems called for. Are you pressing for a conviction on a lesser charge?"

"No, sir," said Paton. "But I want it to be clear from the beginning that Captain Brown was placed in an awkward position by his orders. The fact that he was to pretend his destination was *not* Frobisher until the last moment could be construed by the ship's company as an invitation to mutiny. They must have felt the Navy had tricked them . . ."

"Neither the Navy nor Captain Brown is on trial. Surely it is up to defense counsel to present these circumstances in mitigation?"

"Sir," said Paton, "there is something peculiar about this case which the inquiry has completely failed to clarify. What happened was not so much a mutiny as a well-organized sit-down strike. The complement of the *Mirror* was twenty-seven. When

twenty-six officers and men are suddenly and unexpectedly ordered to commit suicide, in their estimation, they don't calmly and respectfully refuse, in a body. Some say meekly 'Yes, sir,' some object, looking round for support, some try to sit on the fence. What I want to find out is how this sitdown strike was organized, when nobody had the slightest idea that there was anything to strike against."

"I see," said Merchant thoughtfully, looking at Paton with more respect.

The members of the court conferred. And the orderly was sent for the accused and his counsel. Brown took the stand again to answer defense counsel's questions.

Winterset made little of the material presented to him by the judge advocate. Instead he brought out Brown's view, prior to the meeting, that he was commanding an entirely efficient ship with high-grade officers and crew. Asked how he would then have rated the loyalty of his officers as a body, the captain said unhesitatingly: "Above average."

"So when the events which led to the charge took place, they came as a complete shock to you, sir?"

Brown hesitated, clearly trying to give an entirely honest answer. "Yes," he said at last. "The mu-

tiny did come as a surprise. With certain other crews I might not have been surprised . . . with this one, yes. I thought they'd have obeyed *any* order."

"Would you give a brief assessment of Lieutenant Simpson—again, prior to the mutiny?"

"Yes. I found him capable and painstaking. An executive officer of the old-fashioned type, concerned first and foremost that his job was done as efficiently as possible."

"Old-fashioned, commander?"

Brown looked at Simpson, who did not meet his gaze. "I don't mean that as a condemnation. Quite the reverse. Mr. Simpson never showed any of the modern clock-watching tendency which seems to be creeping even into the Navy."

WINTERSET, Paton had to admit, was doing a good job for Simpson. The implication was: if such an officer rebelled against an order, anyone would rebel against that particular order. And he created this impression by the testimony of the captain against whom Simpson had mutinied.

It must have been the coolest mutiny in history. Apparently hardly a voice had been raised.

The next witness was Schneider, a signalman. Paton called him instead of one of the officers because Schneider was evidently

not very bright and would probably be incapable of hiding anything there was to hide.

And so it proved.

"How were you told," Paton asked, "that there would be no landing on Frobisher?"

"One of the officers came and told us," Schneider was a tubby, nervous man who breathed noisily and very fast. Since his health must be excellent, his difficulty with his breathing could be ascribed to anxiety and awe.

"Which officer?"

"I don't remember."

"Court would like to caution the witness," said Merchant, rather to Paton's annoyance. Paton wanted to put the signalman at his ease and then trick him. Merchant was liable to frighten the life out of him.

After the president had warned Schneider that he must reply truthfully and without evasion, Paton continued. But he didn't press for the name of the officer.

Instead he said: "What did he tell you?"

"Oh, that it was all right, that we didn't have to land, sir."

"Were you relieved?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why?"

"Nobody ever came back from Frobisher, sir."

"Who told you that?"

The signalman looked confused. "It's so, isn't it?"

"So this officer told you it was

all right, you didn't have to land?"

"That's what I said, sir. And that's what he said."

"How long before this did you know that the ship's mission was to explore Frobisher?"

The signalman wet his lips and his eyes darted about. "We didn't know, sir."

"Come now," said Paton gently. "You were relieved when an officer told you it was all right, you didn't have to land on Frobisher after all. You must have known before then that the captain was going to order a landing."

"It was a rumor, sir."

"How long had this rumor been going round?"

"I don't remember."

"A day? A week? From the start of the voyage?"

The tubby signalman looked trapped. Paton cast a quick glance at Simpson. The exec was staring calmly at the ceiling.

"It was a rumor," Schneider said stubbornly.

Paton let it go at that and Winterset had no questions.

THE next witness was Lieutenant James Kramp, next in seniority to Simpson. He was a tall, fair-haired, All-American boy.

"Lieutenant," said Paton, "how many consultations did the officers of the *Mirror* hold before refusing to obey Captain Brown?"

The Lieutenant started at the abrupt attack. "None," he said. "We didn't know until that moment what our mission really was."

"The crew did," Paton observed. "Lieutenant, are you asking us to believe that the captain of a naval ship gave an order and twenty-six officers and men spontaneously refused to obey it?"

"That's how it happened," said Kramp.

Merchant held up his hand. He glowered at Kramp, who wilted. "If," said Merchant grimly, "there is further evidence that officers and men of the *Mirror* are involved in a conspiracy to prevent the true facts of this incident becoming known, you will all be held indefinitely until such time as you are prepared to testify fully and truthfully."

"Yes, sir," said Kramp, abashed.

"How long," Paton demanded, "was the ship's mission known to you, lieutenant?"

Kramp surrendered. "Almost from the beginning. As a rumor."

"Who circulated this rumor?"

"Nobody started it. You know how rumors are. The word was we were en route to Frobisher."

"Why, then, did you wait until the ship was actually in orbit around Frobisher before making any stand?"

"Well, we weren't supposed to know. The rumor might be

wrong. A dozen things might happen to prevent us landing on Frobisher."

"But it was previously agreed among you all that if and when the captain ordered a landing on Frobisher, every one of you would refuse?"

"Yes."

"How many expeditions have there been to Frobisher?"

"Five."

"With what result?"

"The first got away all right. But that was fifty years ago, and all the men who went on that landing party are dead now. Since then there have been four landings and nobody's ever come up again."

"How do you know, lieutenant?"

"Huh?"

"How do you know? Who told you?"

"I just know."

"Wasn't it Lieutenant Simpson who told you?"

"It may have been."

"How did he know?"

Winterset objected: How could Kramp testify to the knowledge of the accused? The objection was sustained.

Merchant asked if the judge advocate's questioning of this witness was likely to be lengthy. Guessing what was coming, Paton took a chance and said yes. The president then recessed the court.

AT the afternoon session Paton had a bulky folder which he had not had that morning. He also had an air of resolution which he had not had either. He didn't quite know where he was going yet, but he knew now that he was going somewhere.

"Lieutenant," he said to Kramp, "I'm going to show you a picture. I want you to tell me if you recognize anyone in it."

A photograph was handed to the witness. It showed about a dozen men in a group pose. Kramp looked at it for a long time. Then he said: "This man here looks something like Lieutenant Simpson."

Paton, watching Simpson, saw the first trace of uneasiness. Simpson didn't like this. He was quite happy about being on trial for mutiny, even about being accused of being the ringleader. But he didn't like photographs being produced.

"Something like Mr. Simpson?" Paton said.

"It might be Simpson."

"Do you know who the men in that photograph are, lieutenant?"

"No."

"They are the men who landed on Frobisher fifty years ago."

There is never a sensation in a court martial as there often is in a criminal court. There are no public seats and the whole atmosphere is stiffly military. But

when Paton spoke, there was near sensation in the room. The court members looked at each other, half startled, half outraged, several of them on the point of protesting about having their legs pulled.

Simpson settled in his chair. It was hard to tell whether he was calmly accepting disaster or relieved to find the judge advocate on entirely the wrong track.

Kramp was honestly bewildered. "Then it can't be Simpson," he said.

"Why not, lieutenant?"

"Well . . . this man here was forty or so fifty years ago. If he were alive he'd be ninety now."

The photograph was passed around the court. Merchant examined it closely and then glowered at Simpson.

Simpson and Winterset conferred in whispers, and then the defense counsel rose. Addressing Merchant, he said that accused was prepared to testify now if the court wished, to attempt to dispose of the matter of the photograph.

There was quick agreement, Kramp was dismissed, and Simpson was sworn.

Paton said: "Your name is David Simpson?"

"Yes."

"Not Henry McQueen Bailey?"

"If you'll let me speak—Bailey was my grandfather. My mother's father. It's not surprising

there should be a resemblance, is it?"

Paton consulted another paper in his folder. "Please explain why your mother's maiden name is entered on your service record as Herbert."

Simpson was not so calm now. He looked hot. "Well, to tell the truth, my mother was illegitimate. She took her mother's name."

"Ah, thank you, lieutenant," Paton said. "That relieves me of the necessity of asking you why no daughter of Bailey is on record. Bailey died forty-seven years ago, did he not, just three years after returning from Frobisher?"

"That's right."

"So your mother must have been born long before he went to Frobisher?"

"Obviously," Simpson retorted. "She was twenty when I was born, forty-two years ago."

"And when did she die?"

"If you have my service record, you should know. On March 21, 2133."

"Lieutenant," said the judge advocate, "I now have to ask you to explain some very peculiar things. Your mother's birth and death and your own birth are all stated to be registered at Pinkton, Ohio—where there happened to be a fire twenty-nine years ago which destroyed all records. You entered the Navy just three years ago—"

"Wrong," said Simpson. "I entered the Navy twenty years ago."

"Yes, but at Carson Base, near the Seefarne system. Carson Base was blown up three years ago when an atomic drive went wild. All Carson Base records being destroyed, when you reported for naval duty here on Earth, the Navy only had your word for it that you'd ever been in the Space Navy at all."

Winterset rose. "Objection," he said. "Accused is standing trial for his part in a mutiny. Not for having his personal records destroyed in fires or accidents."

"Objection overruled," said Merchant sharply. "Continue, judge advocate."

"Since you know your mother was the illegitimate daughter of Henry McQueen Bailey," Paton said, "a thing we'd hardly expect you to know, but let that pass—you may also know other things about Bailey."

"I don't," said Simpson quickly.

"For example, how he died. Do you know that?"

"He was lost in a sailing accident."

"Exactly. Lost at sea. In other words, his body was never found. Let me tell you another strange thing. All the men who returned from Frobisher with Bailey died within five years. And all in acci-

dents of some sort. In two or three cases they identified each other's bodies."

WINTERSET wanted to object again, in a sense quite rightly, for Paton was straying very widely from the events which had brought Simpson to trial. But the expression on the president's face showed defense counsel it would be a waste of time to object.

"You joined the Navy three years ago as a junior grade lieutenant—" Paton began.

"I told you," Simpson interrupted, "I joined the Navy at Carson Base twenty years ago."

"But only the last three years are currently on record. Your service record, such as it is, shows that you have spent most of your career as an exploration party leader. Your alleged Carson Base naval career fitted you so well for this work that you could scarcely have been given any other duties. In other words, you've spent three years making sure that when the next naval exploration team was sent to Frobisher, you'd be a member of it."

"This is complete nonsense," said Simpson angrily. "Who would have thought another exploration team would be sent to Frobisher, anyway? Isn't it obvious by this time that the place is a deathtrap? There won't be another ship sent to land an exploration party there, ever."

"You mean," Paton said quietly, "there *wouldn't* have been another party sent after this episode, after every spaceman, civil or military, knew that four expeditions had been lost and that the last one mutinied rather than land."

Without giving Simpson a chance to say anything, he changed his tone and asked sharply: "Can you produce a single witness who knew you more than three years ago?"

"I've told you, I was serving with the Navy at Carson Base—"

"If you were, lieutenant, you must have run into many hundreds of navymen who weren't blown up with the base. Please name twenty or so and I'll arrange to have some of them subpoenaed."

Simpson hesitated and then shrugged. "Well, there's Lieutenant Plower—Butch Plower. And Harry Benson. And John Maddin. And Bill Steward. And—"

"Just a minute, lieutenant. Further details, please. What did Plower look like? And Benson?"

"Well, Plower was a jg like me, big red-headed guy who used to be a navigator but moved to communications. Benson was an ensign nine years ago, fat, with a bald patch. Maddin . . ."

Paton listened attentively as Simpson spoke. Winterset looked at the ceiling and at his boots and sighed in protest. He hadn't been

keen to defend a mutineer, but he had expected a normal trial in which he could knock a few holes in the prosecution case without committing himself in any way to approval of what Simpson had done.

"Thank you, lieutenant," Paton said at last. "We'll try to trace some of these men. Particularly Benson."

"Why Benson?" Simpson asked suspiciously.

"He can give the whole story of your Carson Base service, can't he? He was the navigator who moved to communications later?"

Simpson hesitated, seeing the trap. "No, that was Maddin."

"Are you sure? I thought you said—"

"No, Benson, I mean."

PATON turned to the court stenographer. Before he could speak, Simpson burst out: "It was years ago, I may have gotten these guys mixed up a bit."

"Then let's start at the beginning again," said Paton pleasantly. "Who was the fat ensign who worked with you seven years ago?"

"The court will question the witness," Merchant said. "Mr. Simpson, Lieutenant Baker here tells me that only about a hundred officers and men were killed in the Carson Base disaster. In a naval career lasting seventeen years there you must have en-

countered a great many men who were not killed in that tragedy. You must, indeed, have met several of them recently. . . . If you really did serve at Carson Base for seventeen years you should be able to prove it very easily. Can you?"

"Nothing to say," said Simpson sullenly.

Merchant's eyebrows went up. "It is contempt of court to refuse to answer a question."

"Nothing to say."

Winterset stood up and pointed out that Simpson was on trial on charges arising out of a mutiny. If he was now to be charged with impersonating a naval officer, the defense would like notice of the fact.

Merchant looked at the judge advocate. "The proceedings have become very irregular," he said. "The court would like the judge advocate to explain his tactics. What is his contention?"

"That Lieutenant Simpson arranged to be an officer on the ship assigned to explore Frobisher," Paton said. "That he deliberately sabotaged the project, the nature of which was known throughout the ship from the start of the voyage despite the supposed secrecy of the captain's orders. That he fraudulently represented himself three years ago as a naval officer from Carson Base, with a false record of exploration experience designed to get himself assigned

to the exploration ship which would eventually be sent to Frobisher."

"With what motive?" the president asked.

"I suggest that he is in fact Henry McQueen Bailey; that he and the other members of the original exploration team found something on Frobisher that they decided to keep to themselves; that they left Frobisher and made a discouraging report, knowing that if they remained on the planet other landings would be made; that they arranged a series of accidental 'deaths' and then returned one by one to Frobisher; that since then one or other of them has left Frobisher at intervals and sabotaged all attempts at exploration; that their long-term purpose was to make exploration of the planet appear so dangerous that no further landings would be made."

There was a pause. "That's a remarkable theory," said the president, with considerable understatement.

"If the court will allow me some latitude," Paton said, "I think some corroborative evidence might be elicited from other witnesses. It is not my contention that all the officers and men on board the *Mirror* conspired to prevent a landing, possessing information about Frobisher which is not generally available. I submit that Simpson, claiming

knowledge acquired during his alleged Carson Base service, systematically convinced the entire ship's company that nobody who landed on the planet would ever get away alive."

"What sort of latitude do you want?" Merchant said bluntly.

"I want to press the other witnesses for details of conversations which convinced them that landing on Frobisher meant certain death."

"If the court please," Winter-set retorted, "I suggest that what the judge advocate wants to do is get the other witnesses to rat on Lieutenant Simpson."

Paton shrugged "If Lieutenant Kramp and the other officers backed Simpson in his refusal to obey a lawful order of Captain Brown, they are not blameless. But there is a considerable difference between refusal to commit suicide and fraudulent misrepresentation."

THERE was a long pause. Merchant was clearly puzzled about what to do. The proceedings had already become so irregular that it might be best to convene a new trial. If there was anything in the judge advocate's allegations, a new trial would have to be held anyway.

Although Paton had merely suggested that the other landings on Frobisher had been sabotaged, it was obvious that this

might have entailed something more serious than fraud. Some fifty men had disappeared. Whatever the truth might be, the chances were that murder formed part of it. . . .

At last Merchant made up his mind. "The court martial will proceed," he said. "If the judge advocate can produce evidence to support these allegations, nothing could be more relevant to the charge against David Simpson. But I would remind him that the present court is concerned only with the *Mirror* mutiny, if such it was."

Simpson was excused and Kramp was recalled.

It was scarcely legal and it was certainly not fair. By adroit questioning, Paton managed to inform Kramp that Simpson was now suspected of something much wider and more serious than his part in the *Mirror* mutiny, and to suggest that Kramp might become an accessory in these comprehensive crimes if he continued to back Simpson.

Further, by suggesting that the planet Frobisher might not in itself represent any danger to a landing party, the judge advocate cut the ground from under the feet of the mutineers. It was one thing to refuse to obey an order to enter a gas chamber—but quite another matter when it began to appear that the chamber

had contained nothing but perfectly good air.

Kramp became uneasy. Clearly he had thought himself on perfectly safe ground. In peacetime it could scarcely be said to be "wilful, without proper authority, and without justifiable cause" to refuse to obey an order which could only result in death, especially when all other orders had been promptly and respectfully obeyed. Even if the Navy decided otherwise, the public would have immense and weighty sympathy with men in such a position.

But if it turned out that the whole thing had been something of a fraud, there would be no sympathy for anybody except Captain Brown.

Pressing his advantage, Paton asked: "When did Simpson first tell you that you were on a suicide mission?"

"Well, we knew we were going to Frobisher. And some of us knew about the other expeditions. . . . Simpson was the one that didn't seem to care. I mean, he said we were all going to get killed, but he didn't say anything about refusing to land."

"When did he say you were all going to get killed?"

"From the beginning, I guess. I never thought he was being clever about it, but now . . ." Kramp was having great difficulty in not looking at Simpson.

"Now?" Paton prompted.

"Well, maybe he *was* very clever. I mean, the way he acted, Frobisher was suicide but he did not seem to think of not landing until the rest of us began to get the idea. It was our idea, not his."

"Can you remember exactly what he said?"

"When?"

"The first time he mentioned Frobisher."

"He said 'That's the end of a lot of promising naval careers. They were pretty smart not to give any of us the chance to go sick.'"

"What else did he say?"

"You mean, exactly?"

"Yes, exactly."

"I think I said 'A lot of landing parties come unstuck.' Then he said 'This one for sure. The things I could tell you about the Frobisher landings. . . .'"

PATIENTLY Paton extracted the story of how Simpson, the loyal, resigned exec, had had to be convinced that it was the decision of the officers and men of the *Mirror* that when the captain ordered a landing they should refuse.

Then Paton asked what Simpson had told them about the previous landings. Several times Winterset pointed out wearily that the judge advocate was leading the witness. The president sustained some objections, overruled others. Merchant made no

secret of the fact that the court wanted to get to the bottom of the case by whatever methods.

"If the judge advocate fails to produce concrete evidence supporting these new allegations," he said, "the court will ignore all this testimony in reaching a verdict."

Prolonged examination of Kramp failed to reveal anything sinister in Simpson's behavior on the voyage. But it did reveal a great deal of detail which Simpson had given about the five previous landings.

Taking due note of this, Paton kept Kramp on the stand until he could be reasonably sure that the president would adjourn the court without allowing Winterset to begin his cross-examination. Then Paton indicated that he was finished with the witness. And the president duly closed the proceedings.

* * *

The next morning Merchant saw Paton and Winterset privately in an anteroom before the court opened.

"Simpson tried to escape last night," he said. "He got as far as the Mars ship, using the name Joe Abbot, before he was picked up by military police."

Winterset was impassive. "I suggest, sir, that this proves nothing. Whatever the truth of the matter, he's probably decided that he's a dead duck."

Merchant nodded. "That's my opinion. There may be further charges later, of course. For the present there will be no mention of the accused's attempted escape. Judge advocate, do you have new witnesses?"

"Yes, sir."

"In the circumstances, I think you'd better tell us both what you expect them to prove."

"I'm not sure I want to be in on this," Winterset said. His manner, normally somewhat cold, was rather more aloof than usual. "I guess it's no secret that I was never particularly keen to defend these men. All the same, it's my duty to say anything that can be said in Simpson's defense, and attack the judge advocate's case at all points. I think I can do it better if my hands aren't tied."

"It's only my opinion," said Merchant with dry sarcasm, "but don't you think you can defend better if you've some idea what you're defending against?"

"The new allegations by the judge advocate are utterly fantastic," Winterset declared. "Simpson may be a mutineer, but that's all he is. However, if you insist, sir, I'll listen to what the judge advocate hopes to prove."

"I have expert testimony on all the Frobisher landings," Paton said. "I expect it to show that what Simpson allegedly told the officers of the *Mirror* was true—indeed, remarkably true. So

true, accurate and complete that Simpson will have great difficulty in explaining how he acquired his information."

Winterset shrugged. "If that's all, I can't see how it harms Simpson. First you said he told lies to prevent the landing. Now you say he told the truth to prevent the landing."

"That isn't all. . . ." Paton began.

Merchant interrupted. "You must admit," he said to Winterset, "that such knowledge on Simpson's part supports the allegation that he was deliberately placed on the ship assigned to explore Frobisher and that he may in fact be Henry Bailey."

Winterset shook his head. "No more than it supports his own statement that he served for seventeen years at Carson Base."

Merchant shrugged. "You two gentlemen will have an opportunity to argue this out in court. You said you had further testimony, judge advocate?"

Paton hesitated. "I have a very important witness . . . I'm quite ready to tell you all about him, but I don't want defense counsel to warn Simpson."

Winterset stood up. "This conference wasn't my idea," he said coldly. "I'm quite prepared to test evidence, fantastic or otherwise, as it arises."

He nodded to the other two and went out.

"I'd be interested to hear about this witness," the president said.

Paton told him.

IN the opening minutes Winterset probed Kramp's story very thoroughly. He caught him out in minor contradictions, but failed to shake him. Kramp gave the impression of being a reluctant witness who had finally decided that the only thing to do was to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

When Kramp left the stand, Paton called James Norton Bailey.

Simpson couldn't help bucking like a startled horse. Even Winterset jumped. The defense counsel had been expecting a parade of expert witnesses on the previous Frobisher landings, men who had been on the ships concerned but not in the landing parties.

James Bailey entered. And there was a second sensation. For he looked exactly as Simpson would look in thirty years' time.

Bailey was sworn and Paton asked him at once: "Do you know this man?"

"It's unbelievable," said Bailey, "but I could swear it's my brother Harry."

"Why is it unbelievable?"

"Because Harry was twenty years older than me. All the same . . . Hell, it must be Harry."

The president looked as if he

was on the point of intervening. Paton said quickly: "When did you last see your brother?"

"After he came back from Frobisher."

"Assuming that this man here is your brother," Paton said, "can you explain why he should be so surprised to see you?"

"Well, I guess because he thought I was dead."

"Explain that, please."

"About the time he was killed . . . at least, about the time he was supposed to be killed . . . I was on a scouting trip on Venus. I was reported missing. And yet . . ."

Bailey shook his head, puzzled. He was an old man. The contrast between him and Simpson, allegedly some twenty years older than James Bailey, made Paton's story seem ridiculous.

"But you turned up," Paton prompted.

"Yes. There was a big story in all the papers about a year after Harry was killed. I mean . . . Anyway, what I don't get is, where was he? If he wasn't dead, he must have seen the story in the papers and wouldn't be surprised I'm still around. I just don't know . . ."

Simpson stood up. "Okay, I'll tell you," he said resignedly.

The president looked hard at him. "You want to make a statement?"

"I guess so."

"I'd like to have a consultation with the accused," said Winter-set.

"What's the use? Maybe he hasn't got me"—nodding at Paton—"but he knows the truth and he's going to keep on till he has. Anyway, I guess the truth had to come out sometime. And it isn't so bad as you've all been trying to make out."

James Bailey was dismissed, still looking puzzled. And Simpson began his story.

"I'm Harry Bailey all right. There was nothing funny about that first exploration trip. It was half Navy, half civilian—things were done differently in those days.

"We landed at the north pole and found ourselves in a warm, comfortable region, not too overgrown because there's a kind of grass that can take on every other kind of vegetation and beat it. At the pole, anyway, there's a nice balance between trees and bushes and grass.

"Right away we met the local inhabitants. They were a kind of big green slug . . . "They came towards us, about fifty of them—and though they didn't look dangerous, we moved right back to the ship. Somebody shouted 'Keep back!'—and they did.

"We couldn't understand it. They stopped just as if they understood. Curious, somebody else shouted 'Move five feet forward

and then stop.' Well, they did that too. All of them.

"I'm cutting this short, so I won't tell you all that happened in detail. In a few hours we knew that the Frobs—we called them that because they lived on Frobisher—would do exactly as we told them. More than that, we didn't even have to tell them. If we simply thought things at them, they did them. They were telepaths, obviously, able to pick up strong thoughts.

THE Frobs didn't have any will of their own. We were never able to study them in their natural state, for whenever we were near them they did everything we wanted them to do and nothing we didn't want them to do. They didn't seem to be a high life form. All they did was eat, sleep and reproduce. They were not too good at reproducing and we later found they live for hundreds of years. The pattern became clear since they live so long and have no natural enemies, nature doesn't let them reproduce more than just enough to replace losses. There were only about a couple of thousand of them on the whole planet, mostly around the two poles.

"All this time our party was simply acting like any landing party. We couldn't communicate with the orbiting ship because of the layer that stops radio waves.

Since bacteria might be a danger, we were supposed to stay for a minimum of three weeks if at all possible and then go back up and report. Depending on what we reported, there might be another landing, some of us might be left to form a settlement, or we might all return to base and make a full report there.

"That first week we'd have told the parent ship all there was to tell if we could. It was only after that that we began to get ideas . . .

"Apart from the Frobs, the planet was a harmless, peaceful, not very interesting world. Mineral wealth in the region we surveyed was poor. We could live on the vegetables and fruits that grew wild, but there was no meat apart from the Frobs. We tried that, discovering in the process that our control over the Frobs was so complete that they'd kill themselves if we ordered them to.

"Frob flesh was fair, nothing special. We didn't know then, of course, that we were killing off creatures that had lived for a couple of hundred years and might live for another century or two if we let them.

"Anyway, before we learned this we found a much better source of meat. The best there is in the galaxy, I guess.

"You could call it Frob eggs.

Embryos, really, without a shell. Frobs regularly produce sterile embryos. Although they don't know much, they know at once when an embryo is going to live, and then look after it. In fact, the one thing a Frob won't do is give up a live embryo. It figures—there's nothing more valuable to the Frobs than live embryos, because they're so rare. They killed themselves when we told them, but they wouldn't let us touch baby Frobs.

"The sterile embryos, on the other hand, they just leave lying around to rot. Only they don't rot, they simply dry up, and they take a long time to do that.

"When we started eating sterile Frob embryos, we knew we were on to something. It's the tastiest and most versatile meat there is. You can boil it, fry it, roast it, grill it, stew it, and it tastes different every time. It even tastes different if you fry it slow or fry it fast. The only way you can spoil it is to burn it.

FROBISHER still wasn't much of a world, as far as we were concerned. It wasn't until the oldest man among us, Ben Pattella, began to get younger that we began to get really interested.

"There wasn't any doubt about it. His hair started growing in dark again. He straightened up and ran around like a boy. And

then he began talking about women . . .

"Married men aren't sent on expeditions, you know. Very few of us had any strong connections anywhere. As far as women were concerned, we took what we could get wherever we happened to be. And when we talked about living on Frobisher, naturally the main thing we had against the place was that there were no women and probably wouldn't be for a long time.

"Ben, who hadn't used to care, felt it worst. He couldn't wait to get back to civilization and find himself a girl.

"Then we found the Forbs starting to change. They got longer and thinner and developed flippers. Before that they'd moved like snakes. They began to make noises as if they were trying to talk.

"Temperamentally, if you could say Frobs had a temperament, they were still the same. They were completely dominated by us. Gradually we established that they had a certain intelligence—Berger, the biologist, thought they actually developed intelligence to please us. Later he reached the conclusion that they'd had latent intelligence which they might have needed at some period in their history but didn't use now because they did not need it any more. Their intelligence, however, didn't make

them stand up against us, they used it in our service. They brought us all their sterile embryos, which stayed the same in form even when the parent Frobs looked quite different.

"By the time our three weeks were up it was obvious the Forbs were trying to make themselves like us—and succeeding. We were so curious we decided to stay a while longer and see what happened.

"We were beginning to *like* the Frobs. At first there hadn't been anything to like, any more than you like a machine which simply does what you make it do. But imagine a dog with more brains than a dog, a dog that loves you and does everything you want it to do, using all its time and energy to find new ways of pleasing you. I guess we all love power.

WHEN one smart guy among us got the bright idea of using the Frobs to get power over the rest of us, he found it didn't work. The Forbs didn't read our minds, exactly, but they had ways of knowing what we wanted as a body rather than as individuals. And that's what they obeyed. If one of us gave an order they'd obey it, whatever it was—unless it was something that ran right against the general consensus of opinion among us.

"Although we didn't talk about it, I guess some of us were beginning to get at the back of our minds vague ideas that led to what we eventually did. If only there weren't certain obvious snags about Frobisher it could be *home* for us . . . eleven men who didn't have a home, who had volunteered for exploration because they had no strong social ties. Yet it was obvious that the Frobisher we knew wasn't going to last. The Frobs would all get killed, unless their reproduction cycle speeded up. As I said, everybody loves power. And strangers arriving on Frobisher wouldn't be able to resist telling Frobs to kill themselves just to see them do it.

"We knew now how many Frobs there were and how few births there were. We didn't harm them any more, not only because we liked them but also because if you've got any respect for life you don't kill off rare creatures.

"But others would experiment the way we had, at first. Before the thing happened that made us decide what we did, there was already talk among us about trying to put off colonization of Frobisher, just for the sake of the Frobs.

"Then one day we saw exactly what the Frobs were doing. They knew what we wanted, what their world in our eyes

lacked. And as always they tried to please us. Because of their curious physical structure they were able to do it . . .

"They were turning into women."

SIMPSON or Bailey, paused to drink a glass of water. Nobody said anything. The court wanted the truth: now they were getting it. Simpson had shown himself to be a poor liar. Once or twice earlier he had seen what looked like an explanation of something that cried out for explanation, and jumped at it. Then he found, as all poor liars do, that he had only created more questions demanding more explanations.

He had been convincing on the *Mirror* because what he told his mates was the truth, if not the whole truth. He was convincing now because his story flowed easily, sounding at all points like recollection and not fabrication.

"There were only eleven of us," he said. "That's what made it possible. A bigger party could not have reached agreement. Somebody would have stood out. I guess it was a coincidence, at that, that eleven of us thought more or less the same way.

"Originally we were only going to lie about the planet to save the Frobs. We'd talked that out and were quite sure that if there

were big landings the Frobs would go the way of the buffalo.

"But another thing was the way the planet made Ben Patella young again. He didn't go all the way—eventually he looked about forty. What did it we didn't know, though the biologist guessed it was the Frob meat. Frob cells were more adaptable than any that had been encountered in the galaxy before.

"Of course we didn't know if Ben would grow old again the moment he left the planet. Yet it seemed fairly clear that so long as he stayed there he'd live a long time, maybe as long as the Frobs.

"I guess some people will say a thing like this should have been made known to the whole galaxy. But should it? There were only so many Frobs. The meat they supplied, without killing them for inferior meat, was only about enough for fifty people. For that matter, the whole world wouldn't support a lot of humans, not in natural conditions, anyway.

"Well you know what we did. We had to go back—if we didn't, another landing would be made. We thought of leaving some of us behind and reporting them killed, but that too might lead to further landings. Then, too, if we condemned the planet utterly that would seem strange, especially as we'd spent more than the minimum time there.

So we went back with a discouraging report—Captain Brown told you what we said. All the figures and samples we took back with us were cooked to confirm our story. We gave as a reason for the delay in returning the story that several members of the party had been violently ill.

"Before leaving the planet, we tried to make it clear to the Frobs that we'd be back. And they seemed to understand.

"Patella and a couple of others among us had to hide the changes that had taken place in them. It was easy enough—a thing which is very hard to believe is always very easy to conceal."

Simpson cleared his throat. "I've been talking a long time . . . I'll cut the rest short. Not much more of it is my story anyway . . .

"Patella didn't age again immediately, but there were signs that it wouldn't be long. He never went looking for a girl when we got back to Magellan—he'd lost interest again. He had not lost interest in living, though. He and the other two oldish men among us more or less had their minds made up for them. *They* were going back, anyway.

ON Magellan at that time, as in any new settlement, acci-

dents and disappearances were frequent. Patella and the other two, with some help from us, managed to arrange a convincing flying accident. Their copter crashed in a ravine and went on fire. As far as I know, nobody ever got to it. Even if they had, and found no bodies, it wouldn't seem too strange. It would be assumed that the men had got out of the wreck but not out of the ravine. And it was a big cleft.

"Those three went back in an old space-barge. The rest of us went our ways . . . within five years we'd all managed to get back to Frobisher."

"One question." The president interrupted for the first time. "Are you telling us everything? That the three old men would want to get back is understandable. But all of you?"

"We had made arrangements to communicate," Simpson said. "The space-barge was only good for one trip. But the biologist got hold of a powerful little tender. She made frequent trips between Magellan and Frobisher. We had a private mail office on Magellan—there are always plenty of strangers coming and going in a new colony, and we were able to keep in touch.

"When the next landing was made ten years later, we were ready for it. I know what you've been thinking, but you're wrong—there was no killing. We per-

sued the eight men who landed to stay with us. And the fourteen who came next."

"How?" Merchant demanded, baffled. "You've painted no picture of a Garden of Eden. Why were so many men—able, trusted men—so easily persuaded to throw up everything for life on Frobisher?"

"I didn't tell you about the women," Simpson said reflectively. "The kind of women the Frobs became. I guess I can't ever explain this to you, but I'll try. First, they were the most beautiful girls anyone ever saw. that's not so difficult to understand when you realize the Frobs could see into our minds and that they had no desire except to please us . . . Imagine a world of beautiful girls with no selfishness, no jealousy, no meanness. No character either, you might think, but remember they spent all their time trying to figure out what we wanted and how to supply it.

"Well, maybe it was a dream world. Maybe there was no reality about it. The Frob girls only looked like lovely girls. Yet the pretense was so good, so complete, that we were satisfied.

"They gave us children too—not many, for the Frobs still can't reproduce often. And we had to wait while the embryos, kept out of our sight, developed into human children. Mostly

girls, for most of us wanted girl children. But some of them were boys. I've got a son . . ."

The president once more failed to contain himself. "And you were satisfied with that? A life of pretense, among aliens?"

"They're not aliens," said Simpson patiently. "I've told you what Frobisher is like, to us. What is it if it's not the Garden of Eden?"

THERE was a pause. The men who went on exploration trips, Paton reflected, civil or naval, were usually men dissatisfied with the civilization and society they knew, seekers after . . . not truth, but what they would like the truth to be. Secret cities and gold and beautiful women. Well, for once some of them had found what they were looking for.

"After the third landing," Simpson went on, "there were thirty-one of us. Two were killed working on the space-barge, trying to convert it for planetside transport. We had a lot of knowledge and experience to call on. And we still wanted to keep Frobisher to ourselves. Selfish, maybe, yet time confirmed a lot of our early ideas. Frobisher was Eden for about fifty men who thought as we did. More would destroy it. Other ideas, other goals, other personalities would destroy it."

He sighed. "I guess in the end we had to fail . . . as I've failed. Some of us went on the other two landing parties, having worked themselves into them the way I got myself on the *Mirror* expedition. *They* didn't fail. They managed to influence the choice of men to land so that only men who thought as we did landed. That took us up to fifty-one—three more were killed when a building collapsed. We weren't very good builders, at first.

"My job was different. I guess it was too big for me.

"We knew by this time that anyone who had spent a long time on Frobisher could take up to five years away from it without ageing. There was a lot of planning. . . We wanted to stop further landings by spreading the story that Frobisher was certain death. The fact that four landings had apparently ended in complete disaster helped, of course. What the judge advocate said was true enough—I was in the Navy fifty years ago, but not for those seventeen years at Carson Base."

He shrugged. "Well, there's nothing more to say, is there? I tried. I expected to be discharged for my part in the mutiny, and then I'd be free to get back to Frobisher. That was all arranged. Further sabotage of exploration teams, as you called

it, wouldn't be my job. Others would keep in touch with Magellan and do what was necessary.

"But I failed. Maybe I should have told you nothing. But once you'd guessed so much, I knew it was hopeless. I've told you the truth so that whatever was done about Frobisher now would be done after consideration of the true facts.

"Maybe we were selfish. All the same, the Frobs haven't gone the way of the buffalo, under us. I wonder what's going to happen to them now?"

AT last the president of the court was ready to deliver the court's decision. Merchant said, "Henry McQueen Bailey, you have been found guilty of inciting mutiny. However, the court has carefully considered all the evidence, bearing in mind that the most important part of it is the voluntary statement by the accused. Therefore, Mr. Bailey, you are sentenced to be discharged from the Navy forthwith. You will be returned to the planet Frobisher and in due course consultations will take place with the appointed representatives of the Frobisher colony.

"Certain irregularities have occurred and the fifty-one men you represent cannot be absolved from their responsibility in them. However, the court's rul-

ing, subject to confirmation, is that the Frobisher colony is recognized as a settlement with self-governing rights. Such recognition involves no acquiescence in the acts of this settlement, but merely recognizes the existence of a colonized, developed planet."

More informally, Merchant said: "The galaxy is vast and perhaps the individual's most important right is to be left alone, provided he does not harm others. As you seem to realize yourself, your Garden of Eden is not every man's idea of heaven. However the court is prepared to accept that by your own lights you acted for the best."

Paton smiled. He was not dissatisfied. Had he lost his case, or won it? It was difficult to say.

Simpson, or Bailey, was slowly and joyfully coming to the conclusion that he had won his. He didn't quite believe it yet. The court's ruling was more favorable than he had dreamed possible.

He would return to his world of bliss. He would live forever, surrounded by beautiful, utterly compliant girls, in a world on which there was no strife, nothing but perpetual content.

And Frank Paton, gathering together his papers and slipping them into a folder marked *MIRROR*, did not envy him in the least. It takes all sorts to make a galaxy.

THE END

Daughter of the Clan

By WILTON G. BEGGS

'Teen-agers are notoriously restless. Some more than others—Molly more than most!

WHEN Molly crashed beyond the barrier of her sixteenth birthday, she realized she was no better. Each night became more onerous than the last. The bulimia flourished, and her indulgent parents' ignorance of her condition grew difficult to bear.

By her secret admission that she was not normal, Molly unlocked a dungeon in her mind that could never be shut up again. Doubts she had tried to entomb since the age of twelve—eleven years and nine months after being selected by Mr. and Mrs. Smith at Shawville Orphanage—gnawed at her constantly. She borrowed thick psychology books from the local Carnegie library. She hoped to unearth an explanation of the enigma.

Her perusal of the musty tomes was unproductive. In her thirst for enlightenment Molly found scant similarity between

herself and the hagridden creatures of the books, with their neurotic or psychotic conundrums.

"Because of deep psychological causes", or "to prove sexual adequacy", or "to relieve emotional tension" the pages iterated ad infinitum—and about the antisocial manifestations of any number of mental abnormalities.

"What can this have to do with me?" Molly pondered finally, becoming bored with the search. "Until the hunger I was a perfectly ordinary girl. I don't recall being unhappy, despite the mystery of my birth. Wasn't I but one of many babies whose real mothers have abandoned them on the steps of some foundling home at one time or another? The love of my adopted parents more than compensated for that."

Yet, Molly was forced to concede, the bulimia *had* been engen-

dered, and increasingly now she was concentrating on nothing but it.

Molly felt confident, however, that the permutation had been in some way physical, an internal, chemical shift rather than a simple explosion in her brain. None of the dusty volumes seemed to consider this. The stress placed on psychological factors in almost all cases of mental aberration reassured her. It intimated that her difficulty belonged to a different realm from the maladies analyzed in the tedious books. She had been taught by Mom and Dad that the soul is master to the body—therefore, she retained some threads of her faith that she could stifle the demon inside her.

But faith could not prevent Molly from being lonely. Even seventeen-year-old Tom Dixon, her perennial boy friend, seemed alien to her now. It was as if she no longer shared the same human heritage with him. Molly longed for new companions, yearned desperately for, somehow, an intimacy with folk of her own bizarre kind.

ON a balmy Saturday evening shortly following her birthday, Molly ventured her first step into the new and beckoning world of the bulimia. She had consumed the past several evenings with Tom, had actually

gone nowhere after dark except in his company for almost three months, in fear of her actions if she were alone at night. But that wonderful week in late Spring she realized abruptly that she could deny the demon no further.

Unlike most modern teenagers of the United States, Molly had no interest in motion pictures. She was well aware that the Technicolor musical playing at the Arcadia, ten blocks from her home, would bore her thoroughly. She decided to go to the theater, nevertheless. The hunger was goading her onward with expanding glee.

Molly had already quarreled with Tom Dixon that remarkable week. His friendship meant so little to her now that she sundered it one aggressive morning in a quick blaze of contemptuous epithets. Shocked to the marrow by her virulent withdrawal of a charming teen-age affection, the hurt boy had immediately formed a tenuous attachment to another girl. The girl's name was Magda Nagy, a rather wanton young minx who lived across town in the "Little Balkans" section of the city. Since few one-hundred-percent Americans in Molly's district of Shawville approved of the city's hordes of postwar immigrants from southeastern Europe, it was patent that Tom was seeking a debauch to soothe the pain Molly had cre-

ated in his lovelorn young heart.

His present design for the Saturday evening meshed with Molly's hidden desires nicely. Allowing her parents to think she and the unsuspecting youth would attend the theater together, Molly waited calmly on the front porch of the Smith house for him to leave his home next door. When she observed him walking toward his automobile in the driveway, she told her gentle mother and father good-by, and went to join him.

"Drop me off at the Arcadia," she muttered sweetly, falling into step. "The movie there is fine, they say."

The boy halted at once, glaring in angry surprise. Molly's mad impudence seemed to render him fairly dizzy with emotion. Anyone of normal sensibility would have discerned by her manner, by the sly, glassy stare in her jet eyes, that this was a person bent on mischief that night.

"Let me out at the corner of Ithaca Street," she said, as if they were still the best of friends. "I'll walk on to the theater. I have it planned. I'll see the movie twice, then meet you back at Ithaca after you've taken Magda Nagy home from that stupid dance in Little Balkans she's dragging you to. I don't mind waiting if you're late. I'll ride back here with you, and Mom and Dad won't know my date was

with someone else. See, darling?"

As Molly had expected, Tom was both dumbfounded and outraged by the brazen suggestion. From the time they were infants in their cribs she had dominated him by sheer force of will, however. This strange night was no exception.

"I hate you, Molly Smith," he cried bitterly, as they rode down the avenue toward Ithaca Street. "You're treating me more like a dog all the while! I *won't* leave you there. Don't you realize how many brutes hang out at the Arcadia on Saturday night?"

"Then let me out here, love. I'll walk home."

MOLLY chuckled, tossing her raven-black hair back from her face in a misty cloud, knowing he fathomed by her mocking tone that she would do no such thing.

"Who're you meeting tonight?" Tom asked in a stricken voice. His blond head was a blur of unhappiness in the glow of the dashboard. "Who's so terrible that you don't want your parents to even guess he's your new boy friend?"

Laughing, Molly made no reply to the bewildered questions. Though he was furious with her, and agonizingly wounded at heart, she was certain Tom would do finally as she demanded. By the time they reached Ithaca

Street she had teased and brow-beaten the confused youth into a reluctant acquiescence.

This did not mean she was allowed to escape from his automobile without more indignant accusations. At length, Tom extracted a vow from Molly that she would stay inside the theater with her undisclosed admirer until Tom returned to the corner at eleven o'clock.

Molly did not doubt that he would return much sooner in an effort to forestall the folly he had read in her eyes. With this in mind she left the theater at nine. She was anxious to depart: her mission was accomplished.

The theater had been crowded from the Little Balkans district with many noisy young people just beyond Gilbert Park to the west. Inhabited for the most part by first-generation immigrants from Greece, Yugoslavia, and Hungary who clung stubbornly to their old-country cultures, the Little Balkans slum contained more than its share of juvenile delinquents caught between the two distinct sections of the city. From the instant she entered the dilapidated lobby until she stood again beneath the garish marquee, Molly had heard less than half the dialogue from the screen.

All around her had been a tumult of laughter, catcalls, bickering, outright fighting, as the

socially jumbled youngsters of Little Balkans expressed their resentful scorn for even the elementary rules of decorum in a public place. The management had surrendered any attempt to control the Saturday-night mob, Molly noted with gratification.

Twice she had gotten up and moved to another seat in the seething balcony. She stopped moving when attention was bestowed on her by a half-drunken young man probably of Magyar blood. When he discovered she was alone his strongly accented comments from the seat behind her were stunningly lewd.

The man, bored and menacing, was somewhat older than most of the other males present, perhaps in his mid-twenties. Molly had never seen him before, but that was of no consequence to her plan. Her breathing became difficult as the lights of the theater faded behind her.

SHE walked down the sidewalk toward the corner where she was to meet Tom Dixon later. The part of the street where she tarried was all but deserted. Few cars went by, and the small shops on either side of her were locked and dim, with only an occasional bulb burning feebly in the rear.

Molly was beginning to grow anxious before she became certain she was being followed. The man from the balcony came up

quickly. He laughed as she swung toward him with a gasp of pretended fright.

Molly's racing heart pounded faster with each moment that passed. She glanced up and down the empty sidewalk warily. So far so good.

"Hello." The Magyar was leering at her with unvarnished lust. "What's a pretty girl like you doing out here alone, sexy?"

Molly had already concluded that even at his best he would be considered a very bad product of the Little Balkans area. His greasy brown hair and sideburns were much too long. His clothes were unlaundered, and his mustached face had hardened since childhood in a sneer proclaiming respect for none of society's conventions. Yet, Molly deemed him a basically handsome, healthy animal—and that was all she required of a man tonight.

She turned on her heel, moving away from him.

"Don't be bashful, sexy," he snickered.

Molly was a quarter of a block from the street lamp on the corner. The remainder of the stores and shops were darkened. The sidewalk was a mass of indistinct shadows beneath her feet. Confidently she took an experimental step onward.

"No," he said.

The low humor was gone from his voice. He darted around her

and blocked the way with outstretched arms. Molly motioned as if to brush past him. He shoved her roughly.

She was overwhelmingly excited now. She almost shouted in triumph as he grabbed her wrist in a vise of fingers. She groaned with the splendor of the moment.

He pinned her against the brick wall of a shop, and she struggled in order to spur him to crueler excesses. In the thick shadows she could barely see his brutal face. The rasp of alcoholic breathing was magnified in the darkness.

"Feel this?" The Magyar lay something hard and cold against her cheek. "That's a knife, pretty girl."

Molly was quivering uncontrollably. Never in her brief existence had she been half so thrilled.

"I won't hurt you if you're sweet to me," he taunted her. "But if you yell, who'll know? They're making such a din at the theater they'd never hear."

Pawing her drunkenly he pushed Molly back into the doorway of a shop. The flat of the knife slapped her cheek again. He stumbled, then scurrilously cursed her, as if his clumsy blundering were her fault.

A doorknob bit into Molly's spine. A whisky scent and the sweaty smell of his body hemmed her in. Aggressive hands fumbled at her dress.

Suddenly the bulimia took on a fiercer fire, the glorious heat of it roaring higher and higher in her heaving breast. Molly simply could not hold back the growl any longer. She let it come, plunging upward out of her tooth-sharp mouth in a hideous, gleaming bellow of bestial sound. She howled louder, and embraced the startled man in a circle like crushing steel.

The knife hit the concrete with a dull clatter. The Magyar was paralyzed a moment by horror. Then he screamed. He shrieked once more in a frenzied, certain knowledge of what clasped him. He kept screeching until Molly found his throat.

* * *

TWENTY minutes later Molly threw the slumped body aside into the shadows. Fastidiously she wiped her dainty lips on a handkerchief she had tucked in her bosom for this purpose before leaving home. She smoothed her rumpled clothing carefully. Too much enraptured to do anything except act with a demented aloofness, she walked from the door and went quietly on down the sidewalk to the glowing street lamp on the corner. She had stood there only a moment, shivering with ecstasy, when an automobile stopped at the deserted intersection.

The ancient car—she saw with dawning fascination—was a veritable museum piece. A long black brougham, it was in a remarkable state of preservation. Something about the odd vehicle, something she sensed instinctively, caused Molly to lean forward in puzzled anticipation.

She smiled as a venerable old man—a Gypsy by his garb and complexion—hobbled down with great dignity from the roofless driver's seat. Leaning on a gold-knobbed walking stick he was nearly to Molly when an elderly woman in the rear of the car stuck out her head and spoke to him in a language that was totally strange, but had still, somehow, a familiar lilt to Molly's uncomprehending brain. Without turning the Gypsy signaled that he understood the woman's instructions.

The golden hoops at his ears swung to and fro as he stepped upon the curb and doffed his cap to Molly in a bow. The seamed face was radiant with perverse thanksgiving. His silvery poll shone brightly in the blue light of the street lamp.

"Thou hast apprenticed meetly, Mistress," he whispered in a curious accent so thick that Molly could hardly follow the words. "Thy illustrious grandmamma is much pleased. Verily, thou hast proved thy birthright this fair night."

A S frail and outlandish in appearance as her servant, the old lady in the automobile was staring at Molly. Her snowwhite hair was curled elaborately, and the snaky tresses flowed past her bony shoulders in rivers of ribbons and pale waxen flowers. Sunken cheeks coquettishly roughed, the hag seemed a hideous caricature of some aged, Old World countess-courtesan of the distant past. Even her low-cut gown was fashioned in the salacious style of another time and continent. But it was the face that held Molly's attention the longest—a once-beautiful, aristocratic cat-mask of primordial evil.

"Dost have queries, Mistress?" asked the Gypsy of Molly in a depraved wheeze.

"Many." She felt that she was hurtling headlong, faster and faster, into an undreamed world of grotesque dimensions. She grasped the light pole to keep from falling to her knees. "Many questions!"

The servant folded his withered claws upon the knob of the walking stick and regarded her with approval. "Soon thou shalt know. Thy highborn clan hast myriad foes, my lady. A few suspect, so that the babes be hidden at their birth. 'Tis wise the grand design be shut to thee a little space more."

With the same archaic bow he had given on approaching her, the Gypsy placed his cap on his silvery head and stepped into the gutter. His walking stick struck the asphalt silently as he returned to the brougham. The crone put a jeweled lorgnette to her devil's eyes and gazed at Molly in awful love. Abruptly such overwhelming joy surged through Molly's throbbing veins that she felt she had perished, had been reborn again.

"Patience," the old man hissed as he got behind the steering wheel. "Thy folk shall come for thee, and soon."

The antiquated automobile crawled down the street without noise. In a few moments it was gone, moving slowly into the clouded heart of the slums.

* * *

When Tom Dixon pulled his car up to the curb thirty minutes later, Molly was still standing by the light post, peering in the direction of the unusually hushed Little Balkans district. He opened the door for her gruffly, so irate that he could barely bring himself to speak.

"Good time?" he sneered.

Molly stared, fascinated, at the hot, swift blood churning in an artery of his slender throat. "A very good time," she said.

THE END

KEEPERS IN SPACE

By ROG PHILLIPS

ILLUSTRATOR FINLAY

Same people simply do not know when it is time to leave. The farewell party, the handy space-cab waiting just outside in orbit—nothing works. Does it?

IRENE CARTER said, "That's quite all right. I understand," and slowly replaced the phone. "I still can't believe it," she said. She turned around to face Paul, her husband. Her lips trembled. She was close to tears. "I thought at least Dr. Hanly and his wife would accept. He seemed so friendly that day in his office."

Paul sighed deeply. "I guess we'll have to face it," he said. "And actually, it isn't too bad. It just seems that way. I have my work. you have a wonderful home to take care of, a garden to work in. And," he added cheerfully, "four months of the five years have passed already. Before we know it the whole five years will be over."

"I wish you hadn't said that, Paul," Irene said. "Four years and eight months of it to go. Do you suppose this is why your predecessor's wife killed herself and he became a homicidal maniac?"

"Of course not!" Paul said sharply. "You don't get that way because people cut you. You have to be unbalanced to begin with. Besides, it's beginning to look like we're stuck with a bunch of snobs. Snobs we can do without. I detest them."

Irene shook her head. "That's only true when there are other people to turn to," she said.

Paul hit the flat of his hand with his fist and turned to pace back and forth. "I just can't believe it!" he said. "Ten people besides us on this



stinking star triangulation station, and they cut us out, make us a south-of-the-tracks population of two. Why? Is something wrong with us?"

"Of course not, darling," Irene said, putting her arms around him and kissing him. Maybe we just don't understand. Maybe, some way, they identify us with the other couple. Maybe, in time, they will accept us. After all, we don't know what they went through. That woman killing herself, then her husband going berserk and injuring the Director before he was subdued. That's why the Universe Mapping Commission picked us so carefully out of all the applicants, investigating our social activities and friends to make sure we were the best available couple to fit into community life out here between the stars."

"Yes, that's what Dr. Lind, head of the Commission, said," Paul said. "But it makes us more susceptible than the average to complete ostracism—and that's what we're getting. I'm beginning to think . . ."

"What are you beginning to think?" Irene said.

Paul ran his hand through his hair and laughed uncomfortably. "I'm beginning to

think we are— It's crazy. Even thinking it, I start classifying myself as a schizo with a persecution complex. I'm beginning to think we are the fly and *they* are a spider, jointly, and they regard us as their prey, to paralyze with the poison of rejection, to weave round and round with thread of snobish cutting, but never to kill. I'm beginning to picture space as their web, and we got caught in it. In fact, sometimes when I'm in the Hub where I can look out, even though I know there isn't a solid object bigger than my fist within five light years of us, sometimes I can almost see a web extending out, with the Station as its center—"

"Stop it!" Irene said. "Isn't it bad enough without—?"

The sound of distant voices came into the room from an open window. Paul and Irene looked at each other, the same question in each of their minds. They went to the window and parted the drapes enough to peek out.

The house next door was all lit up. A couple were going up the walk and calling cheerful greetings to another couple on the porch. The drapes and curtains were pulled back from a large win-

dow in the living room of the house, and a large table with trays of food spread out was plainly visible.

"They're having a party next door!" Irene gasped. "And that's Mrs. Hanly on the porch, who not five minutes ago told me on the phone she had a terrible headache. They're having it next door on purpose, just because *I* invited them all to come *here*!"

"A game of Bridge, darling?" Paul said firmly.

Irene pulled her eyes away from the house next door and looked up into the strong lean face of her husband.

"Let's," she said grimly. "And I do believe there's some salad and lunch meat tucked away in the refrigerator."

John Horstman, Director of Triangulation Station Alpha, was exactly six feet tall, broad shouldered and narrow hipped, with florid face, somewhat full lips, and a pink forehead that went up and over to the back of his smooth head, leaving a generous fringe of light brown hair that came around to cover the temples. He wore his clothes well, and even as a boy had been called distinguished looking. He was still distinguished looking, at fifty.

He stood in the center of the room holding a cocktail in his left hand and his cigarette holder in his right, a benign smile on his lips.

"Have they peeked over, Martin?" he called out.

Martin White, the host, emerged from another room, a smugly triumphant expression on his thin, pale face which was made to seem more pale by his jet black hair.

"They peeked, all right," he said. "I saw the drapes part a little for a couple of minutes when Jerome came."

"Wonderful, wonderful!" John Horstman said.

"I would like to see her face," Maple Hanly said eagerly. "I waited until the last minute to call her up and tell her I had a splitting headache. And for her to peek through the drapes and see me come up on the porch!" The animation that lighted her features seemed somehow a desecration.

John Horstman smiled fatuously at his wife, Genevieve, a pale woman with straw colored frizzy hair, a quiet smile on a cruel mouth, and pale blue, lashless eyes.

"I wonder what they're doing now," Ida Blain, a brittle blond, said.

"What difference does it

make?" John Horstman said. "They know we are having a party. They aren't *invited*." He rolled the sacred word in his mouth.

"John!" his wife Genevieve said in mock chastisement. "You're drooling!"

"Aren't we all?" Dick Blain, a computer coder with wedge shaped face and sand colored hair, said. "I wonder how long it will take? It took a year and a half for Francis Cole to kill herself . . ." He licked his lips and glanced from face to face.

There was an embarrassed silence.

"That," John Horstman said tactfully, "we couldn't help. It was a flaw in her. We can hardly be held responsible for that!"

"Of course not," Dr. Hanly said quickly. "She had a disposition for unbalance when she came here. All we are doing is playing a game, a little bit of fun."

"Of course that is all we are doing," John Horstman said. "A game. Under the aquarium condition. We have to do *something* to while away the time when we aren't working. Paul and Irene Carter are it. That is all."

"And Bill and Francis Cole were it before them," Martin White said. "The fact that

the game can be dangerous only makes it more exciting!"

"Yes," Dorothy White said. "Why, Bill Cole might have killed you, John."

"Oh, I don't think so," John Horstman said. "It was a ticklish moment, but I handled it." He shrugged indifferently under the admiring glances.

"I wonder how long it will take for Irene Carter to kill herself?" Ida Blain asked excitedly.

"My dear!" John Horstman admonished, flicking the ash from the cigarette at the end of his cigarette holder, and sipping his drink fastidiously.

Irene Carter studied her reflection in the bathroom mirror. Paul had gone to work up in the Hub an hour ago. It was a month since Irene had taken the bull by the horns and invited everyone to a party, and everyone had accepted with great cordiality, then at the very last moment had called up to say they couldn't come because of a headache, and had gone to a party next door at the Whites.

Up until that evening Irene and Paul had kidded themselves into all sorts of rationalizations that would give

them hope. "People out here are slow to accept you," Paul had said. And Irene had said, "Maybe they identify us with that awful couple whose place we took." But the night of the party it had been too obvious, too viciously obvious.

It shouldn't bother her, Irene told herself. It was so absurd! Why—all over the galaxy were married couples who lived alone for years, and thrived on it! So why couldn't she and Paul just forget about the others and pretend they had no neighbors?

They had tried. It wasn't working. It was one thing to be alone together with no other creature within a hundred miles of you. It was something entirely different to be alone together and perpetually conscious of other people near you, looking down on you, excluding you from their group.

You told yourself, "I wouldn't be friends with any of them if they came to me on bended knee!" And a still small voice in you whispered, "Sour grapes, my dear. They don't want you . . ."

There were hollows in Irene's cheeks that hadn't been there a month ago. Her blue-green eyes seemed larger and farther apart because of

it, as she studied her features. Nor was it all imagination. She had lost nine pounds in thirty days—unless the Station was rotating on the Hub slower, cutting down the centrifugal force which substituted for gravity. That was not likely, and anyway, if that were the case Paul would have said something about it. Even though nobody would speak to them socially, Paul's work as a coder for the computers demanded that the other men recognize his existence from nine to five every day.

The Universe Mapping Program had to go on. If it didn't, there would very shortly be a crew of investigators out here to find out what was going on in Triangulation Station Alpha.

Irene envied Paul his work. It gave him eight hours of escape each day—theoretically, at least. He claimed it didn't but she knew he loved his work and completely lost himself in it. She hadn't been permitted to visit Paul up in the Hub and see where he worked. That didn't matter too much—even though she knew the other wives visited their husbands up there whenever they wished to. But Paul had described things so

she could visualize them from the view of the Station when she and Paul had arrived.

They had had to float in across ten miles of space from the starship. It had taken two hours, and all the way she had kept her eyes on the Triangulation Station.

It was an immense wheel, fifteen hundred feet in diameter and five hundred feet thick, rotating fairly rapidly, for its size, around the Axle, which was held stationary by means of gyros. Either end of the Axle was a huge six hundred inch reflecting telescope, the "eyes" of the station, capable of resolving distant nebulae into individual stars and determining their direction in space down to one ten millionth of a degree.

Such precise measurement was impossible anywhere near a star system. The Stations were out between the stars where only the movement of the galaxy itself affected the steady drift of the station.

Paul worked alone in the computer control section, feeding data into the computers that was sent to him from the Axle by teletype. The room in which he worked had a centrifugal pull of two tenths of Earth gravity—just enough to give a vague

sense of up and down to things.

Irene shifted back from her thoughts about Paul and the Station to see a wan smile on her lips in the mirror. What a starved life they were being forced to live! it wasn't at all like she thought it would be.

A despondency such as she had never before experienced settled over her. Tears welled out of her eyes, but she could not turn away from the mirror. While she wept for herself, her reflection wept for her.

It wasn't loneliness. How could she be lonely with Paul? No, it was something she could never have imagined possible. Something so terribly ironic. She and Paul had been selected to come here because of their outgoing personalities, their love of people, their ability to make lots of friends. Their *need* to have lots of friends.

And here that very need had been turned into a weapon against them.

Why?

To satisfy some meaningless streak of sadism in someone? She and Paul had talked it over and over, endlessly, without arriving at any real understanding of it.

How could they deal with

it? Surely there must be *some* way to deal with it!

Nothing had worked. Nothing had made a dent in things. She had called up each of the women and invited them over. Headaches were something these women seemed to always have! She had called on each of them and had not got inside the front door.

How can you make friends with people when the only way open is to knock them down and sit on them?

I wish I were dead!

The wish rose like a Neon sign in Irene's thoughts, and she drew back from it. *That* way led to suicide, the fate of her predecessor!

She drew back from the thought. *But over four more years of this . . .*

She knew, with a sinking feeling, that she could never survive it. She could stand it another week, perhaps a month or two. Maybe even a year. But over four more years of it?

No.

She would have to tell Paul. They would have to face it squarely. She—simply—could not—stand—it.

All right.

She would tell Paul when he got home from work.

The decision made, she turned away from the mirror.

She started to leave the bathroom when she decided washing her face in cold water would help.

It was while she was bathing her face that the phone rang.

It couldn't be Paul because he had been ordered never to call home during working hours. But who else could it be? Maybe something had happened to Paul! Maybe he had been hurt!

She reached the phone. "Hello!" she said breathlessly.

"Hello, Mrs. Carter," a woman's voice sounded, purring.

"Why, hello!" Irene said, finding it hard to believe her ears.

"This is Mrs. Horstman, Mrs. Carter," the voice said. "I was wondering . . . Would you like to come over and help me with some things?"

"When?" Irene asked, trying to keep the eagerness out of her voice.

"Why, right now would be best," Mrs. Horstman said.

"I'll be right over," Irene said.

Wait until Paul came home so she could tell him about this! She and Paul had been wrong wrong wrong—about everything. This was the proof! Mrs. Horstman had

called *her* instead of one of the other women. Oh how easy it was for misunderstandings to arise, and grow and grow to monumental proportions. But now everything would be all right! She dressed swiftly.

She decided to walk, mainly because she had never used the car belonging to her, and now was no time to break it in.

The air smelled clean and fresh. It was hard to believe that her house and the other houses were on the inside of a gigantic rim of a wheel five hundred feet wide and almost five thousand feet in circumference, and that the ceiling two hundred feet above things was translucent blue plastic instead of real sky.

She passed the White's house and couldn't resist glancing toward it. She could see Mrs. White at a front window watching her. Irene held her head high. *Let the little snob watch her. She was going to call on Mrs. Horstman at Mrs. Horstman's invitation!* Mrs. White was left out of this!

She had to pass the Blain's house a little farther on, and she saw Mrs. Blain watching her through a front window too. Irene couldn't resist tilt-

ing her nose up just the least bit. *She* was going to call on Mrs. Horstman, the wife of the Director!

She really shouldn't feel catty like this, but she could not resist. It was such a wonderful luxury to be *accepted* . . .

She sighed happily as she went up the walk to the Horstman residence, a rambling California style house much like her own. She pressed the button, and from inside came the sound of melodious chimes.

After a moment or two the speaker beside the bell came to life. "Would you come around to the back door, Mrs. Carter?" Mrs. Horstman's voice sounded.

"Of course!" Irene sang.

She followed the walk around to the back door. She knocked, and after a moment Mrs. Horstman opened the door.

"Sorry to keep you waiting," Mrs. Horstman said. "Come in. I'm on the phone, but I do want to get my house tidied up. Here's an apron. Put it on, and you'll find the sponge mop in the utility closet. You can start in on the kitchen floor, and I'll be with you shortly." She took the apron off the back of the chair and held it out to Irene.

Irene hesitated, then took it. "Of course, Mrs. Horstman," she said, putting on her most winsome smile. "This will be fun. To tell you the truth, I've—"

"Yes yes," Mrs. Horstman interrupted impatiently. "I must get back to the phone. Try to work fast. There's a lot to be done. The whole house, top to bottom." She hurried from the kitchen. Her voice came, after a moment. "Where were we, Maple. I was interrupted. Mrs. Carter came, to clean the house for me. Oh I do miss having servants, and one can't very well impose on one's friends, can one." She dropped her voice to normal pitch then so that what she said came through the kitchen door only as a murmur. It was all too obvious she had intended Irene to hear.

Irene waited until after dinner to tell Paul about it. When she came to the part about the phone conversation he became almost apoplectic, and half rose from his chair, doubling his fists. As she went on, he slowly sank back, a sick expression on his lean face.

"It became rather fun, in a way," Irene said with forced lightness. "I discovered all

sorts of tricks to get attention. I left some mop water on the kitchen floor in one corner, and when she discovered it she had to point it out to me. I moved a davenport out from the wall to clean behind it, and left it there, so she had to come and tell me to move it back."

"I'll kill that woman!" Paul whispered with sincerity.

"Wait until you hear the crowning touch," Irene said. "When she couldn't find another thing for me to do—oh yes! I forgot to tell you about lunch. At noon she asked me to fix her lunch, and added before I might get the idea it was to be for both of us that if I felt hungry I could take half an hour to go home, but not to take longer than half an hour. I really would have, too, but I couldn't bring myself to parade my humility before the eyes of Mrs. Blain and Mrs. White. So I didn't eat lunch."

Paul, his fists doubled, mumbled a string of words that Irene couldn't make out.

"But the crowning touch," Irene went on, "was when she couldn't find another thing for me to do. Then she said I could go, and just as I was going out the back door she told me to wait a moment.

She left the kitchen, and after a long couple of minutes she came back—and gave me five dollars.”

“You took it?” Paul said. “That does it! I don’t care what you say, I’m going over there right now and beat Horstman to within an inch of his life.”

“You’re going to do no such thing,” Irene said. “They would lock you up as a homicidal maniac, and I would be left in this house all alone.”

“I’m not going to stand for you to be humiliated this way,” Paul said. “Those vicious little ghouls are probably getting together tonight to gloat among themselves about it. Probably they’re cooking up some more schemes, too. Maybe at their next party they’ll hire you as maid!”

“If they do I’ll take the job,” Irene said. “Don’t you see? It’s something — and anything is better than the complete vacuum they were keeping us in. If Mrs. Horstman hadn’t called me today, Paul, I was going to have a completely different story to tell you tonight. I’d made up my mind to tell you, not five minutes before she called. I was going to tell you that I can’t possibly live another few months, let alone the full

five years, under conditions as they were. You would have to do something about it. Otherwise, maybe a month from now, maybe not for a year from now, I would become so despondent I would kill myself. That’s why my predecessor, Francis Cole, killed herself. It’s impossible for a completely social woman to survive, surrounded by a wall of total, active rejection, with no place to turn. It’s better to be spit on than to be ignored. So let them spit on me. I’ll take it and like it.

“Look at us right now! We have something to talk about, get excited about. I had a whole day of knowing someone was in the next room, of figuring little ways to get attention. Maybe I’m like a bum who has made a meal on scraps of food from an alley garbage can, but now that it’s swallowed I have the contented feeling of a bum with a full stomach.”

Irene smiled lovingly at Paul.

“So leave it alone, will you darling?” she said. “At least for now?”

“All right,” Paul groaned. “But I’m telling you, before we leave here they’re going to pay. *ALL* of them.”

Irene showered hastily. In

front of the mirror as she dressed she looked at her face. It was almost the face of a stranger. The cheeks were hollow, with noticeable muscle lines, the cheekbones quite prominent now.

Strange, she thought, how being a servant makes one eventually look like one.

But the change in her appearance had been so gradual that Paul hadn't noticed it. At least, he *seemed* not to have noticed it . . .

She wondered how he was going to take what she had to say tonight. Should she tell him when he came home, or wait until after dinner? How could she convince him it had to be done?

Dressed, she hurried out to the kitchen to prepare dinner. The five dollar bill she had received from Mrs. Hanly and the ten dollar bill she had received from Mrs. Horstman were still laying on the edge of the sink where she had tossed them. She snatched them up and put them in the drawer with the rest of the money. It filled the drawer the same way trading stamps used to accumulate in a drawer back home, lifetimes ago.

Paul's quick step on the back porch made her stop breathing for a second, then she had mustered up a smile

with which to greet him. The fear of how he would react stood out in stark nakedness in her eyes.

"Hi, Princess," Paul said carelessly as he came in.

A month or so ago he had started calling her that. She had asked him, finally, why he called her Princess. He had looked confused for a moment, then said, "I don't know. I guess it's because you're beginning to look like a picture of a gypsy princess I saw once in an old book."

"Paul," she heard herself say—and recognized with dismay that she had made up her mind to get it over with at once. She rushed on before she would have time to change her mind. "I want you to do something—for me."

"Okay," he said. "What is it?"

"It will be the hardest thing you ever had to do in your whole life," Irene said with quiet earnestness.

He blinked at her thoughtfully.

"Mrs. Horstman wants you to do some work for her Saturday," Irene said.

She put her arms around him, and it was like putting her arms around a statue of stone.

"You have to do it—for

me," she whispered. "We have three years to go yet. It's—very—hard—to keep going . . ."

He took her shoulders in his hands and held her away where he could look at her. "You know how this is all going to end, don't you?" he said. "I'm ready to end it now. I've been ready for months. I have it all planned out to the last detail. I know just how I'm going to kill each of them."

"I know that," Irene said. "So, don't you see? It really doesn't matter if you do some work for Mrs. Horstman Saturday, does it? You can let her insult you, berate you, and do what she wants you to do, all the time knowing what is going to happen to her."

"Hmm," Paul said. "Maybe you have something there at that. And maybe I'll kill her Saturday."

He crossed the kitchen to the cheery breakfast nook and sat down. "I'm going to have a lot of fun killing them," he said conversationally. The way I've planned it, no one will be quite positive it's me. It's going to look like someone else did it and tried to make it look like I did it. They'll lock me up, of course, but I have a perfect booby trap figured out for the second mur-

der so that it will take place when I'm locked up."

"But you will do this one thing for me first?" Irene pleaded.

"All right," Paul said quietly. "For you." He grinned suddenly. "What's for supper?" he said.

"That isn't the way I told you to fix that trellis!" Mrs. Horstman said, quivering with indignation. "I thought your wife was the most stupid person imaginable, but you are worse. Oh, if I could only have some intelligent servant!"

"Yes, Mrs. Horstman," Paul said. "How did you want the trellis, Mrs. Horstman?"

John Horstman, tall, broad shouldered and slim waisted, came strolling across the lawn, puffing daintily on the cigarette in his long cigarette holder, his pink face radiant with joviality.

"Well, Genevieve," he said, ignoring Paul. "How are things progressing for the lawn party tomorrow in honor of our mapping the five hundred millionth sun's position?"

"I'm at my wits' end, John," Mrs. Horstman said. "I can't make this stupid dolt understand a thing."

John Horstman looked

down the length of his cigarette holder at Paul, his fleshy lips curving in disdain.

"Well, Genevieve," he said. "You'll just have to make the best of things. Out here between the stars we have to make do with what we have, you know. Possibly you're working him too hard. Give him a rest. Take him to the house and have him shine all my shoes." He turned and strode back toward the house, not looking back.

"Come along, Fred, or whatever your name is," Mrs. Horstman said. "Things have to be done, and you'll just have to keep working until they're done, even if it takes you all night. Everyone is attending the lawn party tomorrow. That is—except you and your wife. I would like to have you, of course, but I'm afraid you would be even more impossible as a butler."

White lipped, Paul followed Mrs. Horstman as she went toward the house . . .

"Mr. and Mrs. Richard Blain!" Paul Carter, resplendent in a butler's uniform announced in his most formal voice, standing at attention.

Out of the corner of his eye he caught Irene's covert glance in his direction, and

winked at her. In a trim maid's uniform she had made herself, she was moving among the guests at the Dr. Jerome Hanly house party, serving them refreshments.

"Well!" John Horstman said, standing up with his cigarette holder in his right hand and a cocktail in his left. "We are all here now. So perhaps I should make my announcement now, then we can celebrate.

"I received a communication this afternoon from the Starship. It dropped out of hyperdrive this morning, and at ten o'clock Station time tomorrow morning it will be in position ten miles off, to take on board any of us who wish to quit, and send us replacement personnel. I know that none of us wish to quit yet. I believe that Martin and Dorothy White are the youngest of us in service, having been here only fifteen years. Martin has assured me that he and Dorothy plan to remain the full thirty years so that they can retire with a million dollars accumulated back pay and a pension of two thousand a month, like the rest of us. So the *Fermi* has brought no replacements—except, of course, for . . ." John Horstman turned with dramatic slowness to smile

benignly at Paul, then at Irene. His pale blue eyes glinted mockingly. A fleck of white froth was visible at the corner of his mouth. "Frankly," he added, "I am amazed that you managed to survive, Carter. Five years is a long time to someone so ill equipped. The tenacity of the lower forms of life has always amazed me."

Paul winked imperceptibly to Irene, who stood with a quiet smile beside the punch bowl on the buffet table. She was stirring the punch slowly, the tinkle of ice cubes giving a cool sound to the room.

He and Irene had worked it all out. This was to be their big moment — the moment that would make up for the five long years.

"John!" Mrs. Horstman broke the intense silence. "You're drooling again!"

"We all are!" Dick Blain spoke up, then tittered loudly. "I can hardly wait until tomorrow when the new replacements arrive!"

"But sir!" Paul Carter said, standing at respectful attention, his face an expressionless mask. "*There aren't going to be any replacements.* You see, my wife and I aren't leaving tomorrow. We're going to be with you five *MORE* years!"

"That's right," Irene said calmly, stirring the punch. "So now that that's settled, punch, anyone?"

John Horstman's face turned a brighter shade of pink. His cocktail glass slipped from his fingers, to crash to the floor.

"But but but!" he stuttered.

"You see," Paul said patiently. "We have to stay. We have to look after you, take care of all of you. You aren't quite right, you know, and someone has to look out for you, or what happened to Bill and Francis Cole will happen again and there will be an investigation.

"You have to have two strong people who are able to understand all of your little patterns of insecurity, and it would be a crime worse than the death of poor Francis for Irene and I to take the know-how we have gained in caring for you away from you, leaving you stranded again in your fears.

"Strangers, coming into the Station, wouldn't understand that you are all—you understand, don't you? We didn't, at first. The Coles, poor souls, never did see the truth.

"But now you no longer need be afraid. We will be

HEAR A PIN DROP

By EDWARD WELLEN

*How many angels, asked
the theologians, can dance
on the point of a pin? For
Buz, the question should
have been rephrased:
How many devils?*

BUZ was born, which is the greatest opening of all, but They kept closing him in, closing him in. Out of the dream in the womb he reared smack up against the reality of the outside world.

His folks lived and worked on a farm, which is an openness, but the farm wasn't theirs. His father was a sharecropper; his share was mostly working the plow. When Buz was still a child they shook off the red clay and moved North. That should've been an openness, of another kind, but Buz learned fast there were places he could not go and things he could not do.

That would've driven him back on his family but even in the closeness of the family there were things his father and mother shut him out of

and shutting out is the same as shutting in. And then, too, he got less attention as the family grew.

When his first baby brother came along Buz said, "What for you want a new baby? I ain't wore out yet."

His mother and his father eyed each other and laughed.

Buz closed his face and from then on didn't outward his feelings in talk. But shortly after that they caught him beating the baby over the head.

His father gave him a shove that knocked him off his pins, made sure the baby was all right, and then tanned Buz good and shut him in the closet for the longest time.

So Buz learned it was best not to outward his feelings like that again. Closing him in,

closing him in. Instead, he gazed at his father steadily, in a burning silence, his eyes glowworms except they didn't flicker. This kind of quietness was disquieting and sometimes his father took the strap to him out of a feeling of helpless rage, until Buz learned to fog over the cold light in his eyes.

He got in with a gang of kids, the Green Rovers. But there was very little green in their territory and they couldn't rove far without stirring up a rumble with one of the surrounding gangs.

Even within the gang Buz was circumscribed. He was way down in the pecking order. He didn't have the cunning to spur his way up. So he fought. He fought many times, always stubbornly but vainly, weariness at last quieting his struggling when reason could not. So that limits of physical strength were another circumscribing factor.

He closed his mind to schooling and the overworked teachers didn't have the time for the understanding and patience that alone might've drawn him out. So he didn't find escape in good reading or good listening or creating in the arts.

If his lack of certain virtues circumscribed him, so did his

lack of certain vices. He could not find escape in drinking, doping, smoking, gambling, tomcatting. There seemed to be lasting satisfaction in nothing.

Not even in hate. He watched his father with fogged over eyes and seemed to be waiting his chance. But his chance never came. His father died in an accident in the plant where he worked. Buz felt an emptiness. Death's door had shut him out. It wasn't only that. For the first time he realized that time was closing in on him, Buz.

Now his mother was working hard and late to make a living for them all. She was paying higher rent—and getting much less in the way of housing — than most of the folks who lived in the fine apartments in the restricted parts of the city. She couldn't see to it that Buz and the others were making the most of their schooling. All she could do was tell them she was pinning her hopes on them.

The younger children were docile. But much of the time Buz was supposed to be in school he spent roving with the gang or picking up movie money by setting up pins in a bowling alley or by glomming small items and selling them. He liked to watch the shadows

unreel. They opened his eyes to new worlds. But as he grew to know that these were worlds he could never enter the time came when he could not sit still and watch the shadows unreel.

Late one night—likely the stars were out but the buildings and the vaporings of the city baffled his view of the sky—he was simply out walking to escape the closeness of the room he shared with the other children.

A man barred his way. The man asked Buz where he was going and what he was doing.

Buz got flip. Only when the man flashed the tin did Buz realize this was a cop. By then it was too late to back down. Buz stood mute.

The cop raised a hand with a heavy ring on it. Buz tried to slip by. The cop caught him and pinned his arms to his sides. Buz kicked out frantically. The cop swore and landed a fist on Buz's jaw.

The cop got worried when he saw the quiet prone form and the blood and he planted one of the switch-blade knives he carried for such an emergency in Buz's limp hand.

That was the first rap They pinned on Buz. The later ones he earned, having picked up a few pointers at the reformatory.

The reformatory had been confining enough, the three times he was there, but the walls of the state prison promised far more cramping of the body and the spirit. From the moment he entered, the new fish had go-go in his eyes. He had to learn the hard way that in trying to make a break he only piled time upon time, raising those walls higher and higher. Closing him in, closing him in.

Then They really closed him in. And it had to happen just when he was coming downhill. He was suffering from shortitis, crossing off the days and hours in his mind, and he was on pins and needles.

He was waxing wood in the prison furniture shop. The shop screw told him to stop staring out at the sky—a baffled sky—and to put some beef into his job. Buz turned with a preoccupied smile.

The screw told him to wipe the smile off his face and said it in a way that was hard to swallow.

Buz had tried to desensitize himself to these pinpricks but, even while he was telling himself he had to hold on only a little longer, he let go. He grabbed a stick and went for the guard.

They finally clubbed Buz

senseless. They flung him into solitary.

When he came out he waited and secretly sharpened a spoon and waited. It was a long wait, because he had lost his place in the shop, and it was an uncertain wait, but if there was one thing Buz had it was time and in time he and the guard crossed paths.

The screw lived. So Buz lived, too. But now They flung him into solitary for good.

His cell was windowless and unlit. The door was solid but for a sliding panel they opened to shove food at him. His bed was a shelf bolted to the wall. There was a slop bucket in one corner. And that was all.

He knew he would never get out. If he wasn't stir crazy now this would shove him over the line. He would go mad if he simply sat thinking of it. He could escape into sleep for only so long, then he would have to wake and face the close darkness. He had to find something to do, something to take him out of himself.

He fanned himself but his pockets were empty. He could twist the buttons off his shirt and pants and work loose the eyelets in his shoes to serve as checkers; he could scratch squares on the floor. But what was the good of that? He

couldn't see and he couldn't keep the moves straight by feel alone.

There was so little he had to work with. They had narrowed him down. They thought he might hit himself out, so he had no belt, no shoe strings. With shoe strings he might have made a cat's cradle.

What was this embedded in the sole of his shoe?

A pin. A straight pin.

"See a pin and pick it up, And all the day you'll have good luck."

What good would it do him, he wondered.

A Catholic boy told him there was once a big fuss about how many angels could dance on the head of a pin. Or was it on the point? "If I had the wings of an angel." One thing, he wouldn't waste time dancing on a pin. If he knew the Lord's Prayer he could scratch it on the head. But to do that he would have to break the pin in two. And he would need light and a magnifying glass.

What else could he do with a pin?

He could mold a figure of dirt or of bread crumbs, give it the screw's name, or that first cop's, and stick the pin in it where it would do the most bad.

He smiled and shook his

head. Hate, it had come home to him, was no out.

He threw the pin over his shoulder.

Almost at once he was sorry. He still didn't know what use he might make of the pin but it was one of his few possessions. He wanted it.

He began hunting for it feverishly. Then he laughed at himself and sat back on his haunches. He said—but not aloud, for he was not mad—that he had time if not space. He was doing not only a stretch but a cramp. The very limiting of space narrowed the time it would take him to find the pin. But he took his time. It was a game now. *Found it!* Found more.

He had found something to do that would keep him sane.

Before he threw the pin again he made sure he would not lose it to the slop bucket. He could aim the toss so the slop bucket was in the far corner but the corners weren't that far apart. You couldn't tell what bounce the pin might take. So he tore off the tail of his shirt as a cover for the slop bucket. Now he played the game.

He would throw the pin over his shoulder and then hunt it in the dark. Some times took longer than other times but he always found it in the

end. It could not escape either. It was somewhere in the cell. He would find it. Neither of them had anywhere to go.

His ears got so they could pin it down within a hand span even when he bounced it off two walls or ceiling and wall. Too easy was no game. To make it harder he tossed the pin while spinning himself around; that way he couldn't orient himself by the sound.

He was careful not to play the game when They came with his food or for the slop bucket. If They knew about it They would take the pin away from him. They wanted to drive him mad. They had shut out the world and now They wanted to drive him farther and farther within himself. They wanted to narrow him down, squeeze him into one brain cell and then pin him down to one smallest part of one atom of that cell.

He lost track of time. But never—for long—of the pin. He laughed to himself. He was fooling Them.

He laughed too soon. There was a terrible instant when he realized he could not find the pin.

He hunted the cell over and over again, every inch of the floor; the shelf, the cover on the slop bucket, too, because ~~it~~

had landed on them more than once. He could not find the pin.

He kept telling himself not to get panicky. The pin had to be there. It had nowhere else to go. Still he was becoming panicky.

Then he relaxed. Sure! There was always the chance the pin had stuck its point into a crack in a wall instead of bouncing off to the floor.

But he felt every speck of surface, including the door, over and over, without coming upon the pin.

Then a sickening thought hit him. They had found out about the game. They were playing a trick on him. Had They let down a magnet through the ceiling and stolen the pin?

The thought enraged him. He beat his hands raw on the walls. But then he grew cunning. He stopped. That was what They wanted, to drive him mad, to drive him into a tiny corner of his brain, close him in all the way.

Standing on his shelf he was able to run his fingers over fully half the ceiling. What he could reach of it was smooth, unbroken. Was the opening then in the other half? How could he reach that half to find out? He tested the slop bucket in its corner, where his bal-

ancing on its rim would not overturn it, but it was too low.

He paced the pinless floor until the panel slid and the trusty passed a piece of bread and a metal bowl of watery soup through the opening. The panel closed, Buz crammed the bread in a pocket and dumped the soup in the slop bucket.

He ripped off a sleeve and polished the inside of the bowl. He waited. When the panel slid open again Buz used the bowl as a reflector, playing light from the corridor over the ceiling.

Buz let the trusty holler for the bowl until several sweeps of light convinced him there was no hole, no trap door, in the ceiling. He yielded the bowl with numb fingers.

In the dark he sat on the edge of his shelf thinking about where the pin could have gone. He had to admit it was not in the cell. Then it wasn't in the here and now. So it must've gone some otherwhere and/or some otherwhen.

It was foolishness to suppose the pin had given up whatever ghost a pin gives up, ascended to pin heaven, become pin angel. Pins were made of atoms and atoms did not vanish in space, like that, without a scientist changed them into energy, like the Bomb.

But suppose the pin had vanished not in space but in time? He knew he had lost track of time. Had he been playing the game so long that the pin had rusted to nothing and he had been throwing an imaginary pin out of habit for some time and only now had a moment of lucidity that he mistook for madness?

He felt the flesh of his face, his limbs. No, he was still young.

The pin must've gone into another, he remembered the word dimly, dimension. He shivered. He shivered again, but now with exultation, not fear. He would follow into that other dimension. He would escape.

He tried to think how he might do that. He closed his eyes and put himself back to the instant the pin had vanish-

ed. He saw himself spinning, felt the pin fly over his shoulder, heard it hit the wall and—

And that was all. It never hit the floor. It had flown into that other dimension.

Invisible lightning dazzled him and he trembled joyously to a silent thunder. And the walls came tumbling down. He shouted for joy and there was nothing to give off a jeering echo.

It was real.

This was freedom. This was freer than even his earliest memory of the farm. Here he could see no noose of horizon. Everywhere was openness. It was wonderful, wonderful.

He was in the open. Everywhere it was open. Openness opened upon more openness. It was dizzying and he laughed.

THE END

(Concluded from page 100)

here to watch over you, and take the roles you want us to take in your little irrational games that keep your minds off of your insecurities. We will be with you, every day, taking care of you, for the next five years. Think of it! For the next five years you have nothing to fear, because we understand you."

"That's right folks," Irene

said. "We aren't going to leave you. We understand you. So now let's all really celebrate."

The tinkling of the ice cubes floating in the punch was the only sound for a full thirty seconds. Then—

"Punch, anyone?" Irene's voice sounded in the silence born of horror beyond human endurance.

THE END

There were several women in his life . . . and one of them was a witch who had selected him to be the . . .

Victim of the Year

By ROBERT F. YOUNG



Illustrator
SUMMERS

HAROLD KNOWLES had been seeing the small brunette every Monday morning for the past six months, but their trysts were of an official rather than a romantic nature, and up until the Monday morning when he signed for his final unemployment-insurance check he had considered her

no more noteworthy than the other are-you-ready-willing-and-able - to - work - sign-here-please girls who shared her duties with her behind the claimants' counter. True, he had wondered once or twice why she would never meet his gaze and on several occasions he had been mildly, if

perversely, tempted to reach across the counter and tweak the wispy bangs that curled along her forehead; but up until the moment when she slipped the note into his claimant's folder, that was about as far as either his curiosity or his interest had taken him.

Immediately after performing the aforementioned act, she handed him the folder and leaned over the counter. For the first time her eyes met his, and he was astonished at their blue naïvete. "Read this as soon as you get home," she whispered. "It's important!"

Several buildings from the one that housed the employment office he stepped into a deserted store-entrance and withdrew the folder from his pocket. Pulling out the note, he unfolded it. For some time he stared uncomprehendingly at the two frost-kissed maple leaves it enclosed, then he transferred his attention to the message itself. It was written in a large, almost child-like, scrawl, but the character of its penmanship was by far its least remarkable quality.

Dear Harold (he read): Tonight is Halloween and soon you will be in grave danger. I am a witch and I know about such things. As proof of my powers I am enclosing two magic leaves which will

when you need them turn into \$20 bills. As additional proof, I will make a prophecy. Your interview at Ackman Innovators, Inc. this afternoon will turn out the same way all your other interviews have turned out ever since you lost your job eight months ago: you will not get to first base. Meet me at five o'clock when I get through work and I will explain everything.

GLORIA MAPLES

HE read the message again, momentarily expecting the words to realign themselves into sentences that made sense. They did nothing of the sort. Girls had written him silly notes before, but this one topped them all.

He shook his head in an attempt to clear his thoughts. Granted, tonight was Halloween, and granted, Halloween was supposedly the time of year when witches crept out of their cobwebbed closets and did barrel-rolls on brooms, and granted, his run of bad luck had reached a point where he half-believed that it was attributable to other than natural causes. But still and all!—

Gradually the world reassumed its sane and sensible aspect. The are-you-ready-willing-and - able - to - work - sign - here-please girl was putting on a

witch-act in a naive attempt to attract his attention—that was all. Certainly, working as she did, less than an arm's length away from the job-placement section, she could have found out about his forthcoming interview with Mr. Ackman easily enough. And as for her magic leaves—

He laughed and started to throw them away. But for some reason he changed his mind and slipped them into his pocket instead. He wadded up the note and tossed it into a nearby refuse-can; then, putting the incident from his mind, he returned to his rooming-house to get ready for his luncheon-date with his girl friend, Priscilla Sturgis.

Old Mother Hubbard was in her kitchen, rattling pots and pans, when he tiptoed into the downstairs hall—he had taken to tiptoeing lately because of the twenty-dollars back-rent he owed her—and as she never closed her door except at night or when she went out, he glimpsed her as he passed it. She was standing tall and almost scarecrow-thin in front of the kitchen stove, still stubbornly wearing black in deference to the husband who had been dead now for nearly ten years. Her real name was Mrs. Pasquale, and she kept a cat instead of a dog; but one of her first roomers, inspired no doubt by the hunger that sometimes shone in her dark and liquid eyes,

had started the sobriquet rolling, and she had been known as "Old Mother Hubbard" ever since.

His room still smelled of the canned chicken-soup he had heated for breakfast that morning, and he opened the window to air the place out. After shaving in the second-floor bathroom he combed his hair in his dresser-mirror, then returned to the street. There, he lit the first of the three cigarettes he allowed himself each day and blew smoke into the October wind. On the stoop next door a little boy was industriously carving a grotesque mouth in a big pumpkin.

THE site for the luncheon date was a swank restaurant across the street from the department store where Priscilla held down the job of buyer. She was already there when Harold arrived, and he joined her at her table, afflicted with that curious combination of admiration, adoration and awe which the sight of her invariably evoked in him. She was sunlight and laughter made woman. Her eyes were as golden as October days and her hair was the hue of Indian maize; her smile was Indian summer. Small wonder that, in a vain attempt to augment his savings and thereby expedite their wedding date, he had exchanged his suburban apartment in Forestview for a cheap room in the city; small

wonder that his bitterness over the misfortunes that had dogged his footsteps ever since should be all the more acute.

But you'd never have known from the warmth of her smile that in the space of eight months he had been reduced from a prosperous suburbanite to a near-penniless city-dweller with nothing between him and starvation but a five-dollar bill and a final unemployment-insurance check. "Hi, doll," she said. "Coming to my party tonight?"

"I—I don't know," he said, thinking of the outdated cut of his best suit and wondering, as he had the first time she'd asked him, why she hadn't made it a masquerade party in honor of the occasion.

"Oh, but you've just got to come, Harold! We're going to bob for apples and pin the tail on the donkey and dance and everything. Not only that, Uncle Vic is going to be there, and he's just dying to meet you!"

She was originally from out of town, and Uncle Vic, so far as Harold had ever been able to ascertain, was her only living relative. "All right," he agreed reluctantly. "What time does it begin?"

"Seven-thirty—and don't you dare show up a second later. Wait'll you see the Halloween cake I baked—it's out of this world!"

She only had an hour for lunch, and it flew by. Over their second coffees she told him about the palatial new elementary school with the two swimming pools which the Forestview citizens had voted to build and about how the school tax would double itself within five years as a consequence. He was not surprised: as a one-time denizen of the community he knew full-well how the citizens doted on their offspring. Almost before he knew it, it was time to pay the check, and after signaling the waitress he reached into his pocket and pulled out what he thought was the lonely five-dollar bill. It was so crisp and new that it crackled between his fingers, and that was odd because when he had put it into his pocket it had been old and crinkled. Looking at it, he discovered that it had changed in other ways too: it had Andrew Jackson's picture on it instead of Abraham Lincoln's, and in each of its corners the numeral "20" stood out bold and clear.

An icy wind blew down the back of his neck and set his nerve-ends to tingling. Hurriedly he pulled out the pocket's remaining contents. They consisted of two articles: another crisp twenty, and the missing five.

He became aware that he was the focal point of two pairs of eyes. One pair—Priscilla's—were a lambent gold. The other pair—

the waitress's—were an impatient hazel. Hastily he paid the check with one of the twenties, and after receiving his change, escorted Priscilla across the street to the department store. She looked at him curiously when they reached the entrance and he thought for a moment that she was going to question him about 'his sudden wealth. But she didn't. All she said was, "See you tonight, doll—'by."

HIS interview was scheduled for three o'clock. He killed the lion's share of the intervening two hours on a bench in the park, examining the pros and cons of the reality of witches. He arrived at the following conclusions: (1) in common with alchemy, witchcraft was a product of the dark ages and held up not one whit better in the uncompromising light of modern science; (2) there was a logical explanation behind the seemingly miraculous metamorphosis of the maple leaves (he didn't know what it was but he was darned if he was going to lose faith in the scientific light because of a dark corner or two); and (3) the are-you - ready - willing-and-able-to-work-sign-here-please girl knew about as much about sorcery as she probably knew about sex.

Feeling better, he left the park and took a bus to Ackman Innovators, Inc. The girl behind the

receptionist's desk looked at him with hostile brown eyes when he handed her the card which he had received in the morning's mail from the job-placement division. She glanced at it, then promptly handed it back. "Mr. Ackman isn't in right now," she said coldly. "However, if he'd had an appointment to interview you I'm sure he would have told me."

Harold was dumbfounded. "But—"

"And anyway," the girl continued, "we're not doing any hiring at the moment. Come back in about two months."

Two months! "But this card says—"

"Two months," the girl repeated firmly. "Good day, sir."

It was a grim young man who stepped into the street a moment later and headed for the bus stop, and it was a grim young man who got off the bus some ten minutes later and made a bee-line for the employment-office. The girl on duty behind the job-placement counter proved to be as much in the dark as he was. "Why don't you go back tomorrow?" she suggested. "In the meantime I'll—"

"Not in a million years!" he said. Turning to leave, he saw the are - you - ready-willing-and-able-to-work-sign-here-please girl who had slipped the note into his folder regarding him earnestly

from behind the claimants' counter, and for the second time that day an icy wind blew down the back of his neck. He remembered her name: Gloria Maples. *Gloria Maples*, he said to himself grimly, descending the stairs to the street. *Avocation—Witch.*

His new wealth rendered further adherence to his poverty-induced cigarette schedule unnecessary, so he bought a pack of filter-tips in a nearby drugstore; then he returned to the employment-office building and waited by the doorway till five o'clock came. He was halfway through his fourth cigarette when she finally stepped into the street.

Her blue eyes brightened when she saw him. "Hi," she said. "We'll go to my apartment—I can talk better there."

SHE lived in a third-floor walk-up in a rooming house almost as run-down as Old Mother Hubbard's. He followed her through a small kitchen into a slightly larger living room. It contained a battered mohair sofa, a battered mohair chair and a wobbly glass-topped coffee table. There was a three-legged black cat, with part of its tail missing, sleeping on the sofa.

Gloria sat down beside it, picked it up and placed it gently on her lap. "Matilda, this is Harold," she said. "Harold, this is my cat, Matilda."

Harold took the mohair chair. "What happened to her other leg?"

"She got run over by a hit-and-run driver and I found her lying in the street and took her to a vet. He—he wanted to put her away but I wouldn't let him. Nobody ever claimed her so I kept her. A—a witch is supposed to have a black cat."

He looked at her contemplatively. Half an hour ago he had firmly believed her to be a witch; now the mere idea of such a thing seemed utterly preposterous. Why, she was as naive as a May morning! Naive or not, however, she still had some explaining to do. He fixed her with uncompromising eyes. "Please to begin," he said.

"I—I will." She stroked Matilda's back with nervous fingertips. "I'll—I'll begin at the beginning. First of all, I'm not a full-fledged witch yet—I'm an apprentice witch. You see, the coven-sisters in the various districts are always on the lookout for potential witches, and whenever they hear of someone who's discontented and bitter they contact her through their underlings and offer to send her through witch-school. It's only a one-year course, but they're awfully strict, and if you're caught doing something a respectable witch wouldn't do, you're disqualified. For—for instance, if the coven-

sister who nominated you our class guinea-pig ever finds out I'm trying to help you she'll have me expelled immediately—and—and not only that, she may try to do me in too."

Harold lit a cigarette. He took a deep drag. "What?" he asked a little desperately, "is a class guinea-pig?"

"I—I was coming to that," Gloria said. "You see, each Candelmas the senior coven-sister of the three local convents nominates a Victim of the Year and turns him over to the apprentice-witch class till Allhallows Eve for them to practice their sorcery on. Then, on Allhallows Eve, she takes over and tries to do him in in some diabolical way. This—this year you were nominated.

MY—my classmates and I vied with each other in doing mean things to you. First we fixed it so you'd get laid off, and then we caused your ex-employer to tell the employment-office that you quit so you'd have to wait six weeks for your first unemployment-insurance check and wouldn't have enough money to keep up your payments on your car and would lose it, and ever since then we've been conjuring up antagonism toward you in the minds of the other local employers and their office personnel, and—and all the while I kept seeing you come in every week to sign for

your checks and saw how frayed your sleeves were getting and—and how sad you were and—and—Do—do you remember that quart of milk you brought home one time and it turned out to be sour when—when you got around to drink it? Well, I'm the one that soured it, and oh, Harold, I'm so ashamed of myself I could just lie right down and die!" And before his startled eyes she burst into tears and ran out into the kitchen.

Matilda had alighted on all three feet, and now she came over and began rubbing her furry sides against his pant-leg. He patted her head abstractedly, shaken in spite of himself. He *had* been laid off; his ex-employer *had* told the employment-office he had quit; he *had* lost his car;—everything that Gloria had said, in short, was true.

Granted; but that didn't mean she was *responsible* for his job-difficulties—it merely meant that she knew about them. And as an are-you-ready-willing-and-able-to-work-sign-here-please girl, how could she help knowing about them? As for the sour-milk incident, she could have gotten the information from Old Mother Hubbard; after all, it was the old lady's refrigerator that the milk had gone sour in.

Presently he heard her moving about in the kitchen, and in a little while she appeared in the

doorway. "Come—come out and sit down, Harold," she said. "I—I fixed us some sandwiches."

THE sandwiches were peanut-butter. He ate three and washed them down with two glasses of milk. She ate half a one and drank half a glass of milk. Some of the milk clung to her upper lip in a moist white film. "You've no idea how much better I feel, now that I've got my wickedness off my chest," she said. "You will be careful tonight, won't you? The best thing to do is stay where there's lots of people. It's hard for a witch to hex you when you're in a crowd."

He looked at her milk-mustache, growing more amused by the second. "I'm going to my girl friend's Halloween party, so I should be safe enough," he said.

She dropped her eyes. "I—I guess you'll be safe enough there all right. It would be better, though, if you stayed somewhere where there are plenty of policemen. Witches are leery of the law. Devil's deputies, too. His—his majesty insists on outward conformity and good citizenship, and if any of his employees get caught doing something even a little bit illegal, he gives them the ax, and bingo!—their power is gone."

"You mean 'the pitchfork', not the ax, don't you?" Harold said, holding back his laughter.

"This is no time to be facetious, Harold. Don't you realize that your very life is at stake?"

She got up and returned the bottle of milk to the refrigerator. Then she picked up the jar of peanut butter and carried it over to a tall cupboard by the sink. He gasped when she opened the door. Everyone of the shelves was filled with similar jars, and in some cases they were piled two high.

"Good lord!" he said. "Is that all you ever eat?"

She faced him shyly. "Not—not exactly. I eat lunch in the cafeteria across the street from the office. I—I was never very good at cooking. Back home, mom did it all, and when I got transferred here there was no one to teach me."

He stood up. How she had prophesied the outcome of his interview he would probably never know, but one thing he did know: she wasn't any more to blame for the way it had turned out than she was to blame for the way all the others had turned out. After she got over her complex he would return the two twenties to her, and perhaps then she would explain how she had tricked him into believing when he had first looked at them that they were maple leaves. It would be futile to ask her now.

"Well, thank you for the sandwiches," he said.

She accompanied him to the

door. Something about her forlorn aspect prompted him to give her Priscilla's telephone number. "In case you need me for anything," he explained. "And now I've got to go."

"Good—good' by, Harold. And be very careful, please."

THERE were witches galore in the streets, not to mention goblins, ghosts, brownies and spacemen; however, he was in no mood for trick-or-treaters, and he hailed the first cab that came along. For some reason he couldn't get Gloria out of his mind. He was so pre-occupied with her, in fact, that when he entered the rooming-house he didn't remember to tiptoe till he came opposite Old Mother Hubbard's door and saw the old lady standing before the stove, stirring the steaming contents of a large black kettle with a long wooden spoon. It was too late then, for she had already heard him. Setting the spoon aside, she came swiftly through the doorway, hunger shining in her eyes, her black cat tagging at her heels.

He remembered the second twenty just in time and thrust it into her hand when she came up to him; then he brushed past her and hurried up the stairs. In his room he donned his best suit and surveyed himself in the dresser-mirror. He could get by all right, he decided—provided that he

stayed in the background. The background was where he belonged anyway.

Forestview was a half hour's ride by bus, so the sooner he got started, the better. He descended the stairs, tying his tie on the way down. Old Mother Hubbard was nowhere to be seen, but the contents of her kettle were bubbling audibly and giving off a gamy odor that permeated the entire downstairs hall. He was glad when he reached the street. The sky was overcast and the air had grown appreciably cooler. Turning up his suitcoat collar, he headed for the bus stop. Thirty-five minutes later he arrived in Forestview.

Priscilla's house was a modern American-colonial and stood at the end of a maple-bordered street. Cars jammed its driveway and were parked along the curb halfway to the corner. Many of them had out-of-state license plates; in her capacity as buyer, Priscilla traveled a lot and met many out-of-town people. She answered his ring, resplendent in a sequined sheath. "Hi, doll, come on in," she said warmly. "Everybody's just dying to meet you!"

There were almost forty people present, and Priscilla must have praised him to the skies, judging from the enthusiastic way they responded when she introduced him. Especially Uncle Vic, who turned out to be a tall

every individual in his sixties, with crew-cut white hair, keen blue eyes and a firm handclasp. "Come on out to the bar," he told Harold, "and I'll mix you a drink."

The "bar" was the breakfast counter. Uncle Vic made him a stiff highball. "Priscilla's quite a girl, don't you think?" he asked, handing it to him. "Wait'll you see some of the innovations she's dreamed up for a little later on in the evening!"

"Are you from around here, sir?" Harold asked, still somewhat dazed from Priscilla's repentence.

"Oh yes. I'm district manager for Schierke and Elend Enterprises. Quite a famous international concern—though probably you've never heard of it. Let's join the others, shall we?"

PRISCILLA'S stereo was going full-blast and the living-room rug had been rolled up and stashed away in a corner. Priscilla was dancing with a tall young man as darkly handsome as she was radiantly beautiful. Harold, his diffidence routed by the highball he had drunk, cut in. She was feather-light in his arms, and her eyes were golden mirrors in which he saw the world, and the world was a roseate and wondrous thing.

Uncle Vic whirled by, a dark-haired dowager in his arms. He winked at Harold broadly. The

lights grew soft, warm. Time tiptoed from the room—

Suddenly the ringing of the phone stabbed through the stereo-throb of the music. "Excuse me," Priscilla said, slipping from his arms and going into the hall. She appeared a moment later in the doorway, the receiver in her hand. "It's for you," she said.

He took the receiver from her and raised it to his ear. "Hello?"

"Harold?" It was Gloria's voice. "Are you all right, Harold?"

He was annoyed. "Of course I'm all right," he said gruffly. "Why shouldn't I be?"

"Be—because they found out about us—the coven-sisters, I mean. Tonight when I went to witch-class the head-instructress told me I was through and that I'd get my come-uppance before midnight."

"Nonsense, Gloria! You've let this obsession of yours get the best of you."

"But it's not an obsession, it's real. Oh, Harold, I'm so scared!"

She was almost hysterical. Slowly his annoyance gave way before a mental picture of her sitting forlornly in her little living room, her blue eyes dark with terror. "All right," he said abruptly, "I'll come over for a while. Pull yourself together."

He hung up. Priscilla was standing in the living-room doorway, looking at him oddly. "You-

"I'll have to excuse me for an hour or so," he said. "Something's come up."

"But doll, I was just going to start the games. At least stay long enough to help us pin the tail on the—the donkey."

"I'm sorry, Pris—I can't."

She came very close to him and playfully gripped his lapels. "I won't let you go unless you promise to come back."

"All right," he said. "I promise."

HE took a cab, hoping to save time, but a traffic jam thwarted him and it was a full forty minutes later when he climbed the three flights of stairs to Gloria's walk-up. When she failed to answer his knock he pushed the door open and stepped inside. He found her in the little living room, huddled on the mohair sofa, her shoulders shaking. On the floor at her feet lay her black cat, its three legs jutting grotesquely from its lifeless body.

He went over and sat down beside her and put his arms around her. Slowly her shoulders quieted. "She—she dropped dead about ten minutes ago," she said. "Oh why did they have to pick on her—*why?*"

Tears ran down her cheeks, and she pressed her face against his lapel. He saw the way it was with her now; now he under-

stood. Young men like himself, laughing at her, treating her like a child when she wanted to be treated like a woman; buying her candy when she craved flowers. No wonder she had wanted to become a witch—and, conversely, no wonder she hadn't been able to become one. "How did they find out about us, Gloria?" he asked gently.

"The coven-sister who nominated you Victim of the Year learned that you had magic money in your possession—a witch can spot it right away—and told the head instructress. The head instructress was furious. She—she lined all of us up along the wall and threatened to torture us till one of us confessed, and I didn't want to see the other girls suffer so I said I was the one. What made it worse was that I've been sneaking into the coven-library when no one was there and reading forbidden books. That's how I was able to energize the chlorophyll and induce the chromatolysis-effect that—"

His voice was cold. "Who is this coven-sister, Gloria?"

"I—I don't know. I've never seen any of them. An apprentice witch isn't permitted in their presence. But she must be someone you're acquainted with."

He stood up. "Never mind. I know who she is. I have to go now, Gloria, but I promise I'll be back."

OLD Mother Hubbard's door was closed. He pounded on it peremptorily. He pounded on it again. He tried the knob. It would not turn.

The gamy odor still permeated the hall. Probably, he thought bitterly, she had taken her unholy brew to the local Sabbath and was even now presiding over it with her gaunt unlovely sisters, the devil's deputy, in his woolly goat-robe, standing at her side. Well he would wait for her to return. He would sit on the stairs and wait till she came in the door and then he would tell her straight to her face what he thought of black-hearted old women who preyed on harmless girls and murdered crippled cats.

He got out his cigarettes, felt in his pocket for his matches. The folder was empty. There was another one in his dresser-drawer, he remembered, and he went upstairs to get it. Opening the drawer, he paused. On top of the dresser lay a crisp twenty-dollar bill. Beside it lay a sheet of yellow tablet-paper.

Wonderingly he picked the paper up. On it, the following words had been laboriously printed with a soft-lead pencil:

*Every day when I clean
your room I smell the canned
soup you cook each night
and morning and it is heavy
on my heart that one so fine*

*should suffer. Tonight I
want to say, Harold, will you
share with me the spaghetti
with venison meat balls that
I cook all afternoon on' my
stove, but you will not listen
and you give me money and
walk away. Now I give it
back. Twenty dollars I will
never need so much that
good food someone cannot
buy. I go now to St. An-
thony's to say a prayer for
you.*

He stood there immobile for a long time, staring at the simple words. Hunger in a person's eyes did not always imply greed; sometimes it implied a need for understanding, a need to help; a need not to be alone.

At length he left the room and descended the stairs. The hall phone rang just as he was passing it. He took down the receiver. "Hello?"

"Hello," a man's voice answered. "I'd like to speak to Mr. Knowles."

"This is Mr. Knowles."

"This is Mr. Ackman. I hope you'll forgive me for having forgotten about our appointment this afternoon. Why I did, I don't know. Anyway, I just remembered it a moment ago—out of a clear blue sky, so to speak—so if you're still interested I'd like you to drop around tomorrow morning. I'm sure I can work something out for you."

"I'll say I'm still interested!" Harold said. "And thank you for calling."

HE took a cab back to Forestview. Halfway there, the plan came to him, and he had the driver stop at an all-night drugstore. After buying a cake of soap, he climbed back into the cab. During the remainder of the ride he occupied himself by figuring out the details. It was a simple plan, and there weren't very many of them; but thinking of them kept his mind off the sickness in the pit of his stomach.

After the driver let him off in front of Priscilla's he waited till the cab disappeared around the corner, then he soaped all the windshields of the cars standing in the driveway and along the curb, and removed the valves from all the tires. When he was finished he walked half a block to an all-night service-station and made a phone call. Then he returned to Priscilla's.

The party was in full swing. Her eyes lit up when he walked in the door, and a few minutes later she brought in a cake from the kitchen and set it on a card-table in the middle of the living room. It was a big three-layer cake with orange frosting. In its center stood two tiny wax dolls, and around them, arranged in the shape of a pentagram, were thirty-one candles. A glimmering

of the truth struck him then, and he peered at the dolls intently. One of them bore a faint resemblance to him; the other bore a faint resemblance to Gloria.

Still he found it hard to believe. Not Priscilla of the golden eyes, the golden hair; not Priscilla of the golden soul. He saw the big rectangular poster hanging on the wall then, and he had to believe. It was the pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey poster, and there were scores of tiny pin-pricks in the painted animal's body. Only the animal wasn't a donkey, it was a cat—a three-legged black cat with half a tail. It had a whole tail now, though—

Not that it would need one any more.

Priscilla was lighting the candles, and everyone was standing around the card table, looking at him eagerly. Greedily. He noticed something then—something that his previous absorption with Priscilla had wiped from his awareness. The women outnumbered the men by a ratio of twelve to one.

The candle flames leaped up in little flickerings and presently, as the wax dolls began to melt, he felt the first faint prickling of the heat. Uncle Vic leaned toward him, his face thinner somehow, his nose more pointed. Priscilla, her task completed, leaned toward him also. Her face was thinner too, and her golden

eyes had transmuted to a baleful yellow. Her lips were drawn back, revealing preternaturally pointed eyeteeth. It was a masquerade party after all, and the time for unmasking had come. He shuddered at the realization.

"But why, Priscilla?" he asked, fighting to control his horror. "Why?"

The yellow eyes incandesced. "You love me don't you? Well I'm returning your love in the only way I can. I'm returning it with hate—and I'm returning it in full-measure!"

HE drew back. The candle flames grew brighter, warmer. The first drops of sweat dampened his forehead. He held himself tight, listening with all his being. At last he heard the sound he was waiting for—the slamming of a car door. He relaxed then.

"What was that?" Uncle Vic asked sharply.

"The police, I imagine," Harold said. "I asked them to drop by."

"It can't be," Priscilla said shrilly. "Why, if you even mentioned the word 'Sabbat' they'd laugh at you!"

"I kind of thought they would—that's why I didn't mention it. I asked them to drop by for quite another reason. Wait'll you see what the kids have done to your cars."

She was staring at him. So was Uncle Vic. So were the others. "Our cars—" she began. Then, "Oh, you mean they soaped the windows and things like that." She laughed. "We'll simply refuse to prefer charges—won't we, Uncle Vic?"

Uncle Vic relaxed visibly. "Sure, that's what we'll do."

"Who," Harold said, wiping his forehead, "said anything about you preferring charges?" He confronted Priscilla. "Obviously you aren't familiar with Forestview's ordinances. The one I have in mind states that on the night of October thirty-first all private vehicles shall be kept in garages, either public or private, in order that 'our citizens of tomorrow will not be tempted to perform acts of a delinquent nature'. The local kids have been behaving so well for the past several years that the ordinance has been unofficially laid to rest, but I imagine that once the chief of police hears about your flagrant violation of it he'll be delighted to revive it."

Abruptly Uncle Vic blew out the candles. "You fool!" he said to Priscilla. "You utter fool!" His voice rose. "The old man will be furious. He'll strip us of our powers—everyone of us. I'll lose my vicariate! Why didn't you check on the ordinances? Why didn't—"

"Shut up, you old goat!" Priscilla screamed. "He's lying, don't

Sword of Flowers

*He made her a Queen. It was logical, then,
that she should make him a slave.*

THE name of the world was Marda—remember?

It was a good world, Marda, a fine world. There were three major continents (and you recall the names, don't you? You remember Kennecevres, and Rim, and Dnadarue—of course you do)—and most of the world was ocean. That ocean, which held the three continents in the deep cups of its hands, was sweet-smelling, rose-colored, full of light to the depths. (It was the fish, of course, the shining fish that flooded the ocean with their light. And men and women studied the fish: they were called scientists, but their science was not like the science we now imagine: they became the fish, they shared the mind and being of these shining creatures for hours or days at a time: it was called "knowing by knowing," and all living things, except only the men and women themselves, were studied in that way.)

The land was filled with groves of pleasant trees, with green grass softer to the touch than a

feather's edge, with flowers of many colors. Some of these were blue with white centers, others white with centers of yellow. You cannot have forgotten the flowers?

There were no cities and no buildings. What need had the people of singing Kennecevres, of sickle-shaped Rim, of Dnadarue at the top of the world, for shelter? The grass was soft, the climate warm, and soft rain did not disturb these people: the rain, too, was warm, and the rain was also a living thing which could be known by knowing.

Yet Marda (remember!) was no world of perfection: it has never been found that perfection has existence. For on that world was a girl who was named Dorrae, and a man called Rafel, and another man, a man of talent and intelligence, one Ferrico. The words are correct, the words *man* and *girl*. Those are the right words.

It is hard to remember, but memory will come to you soon,

By LARRY M. HARRIS

Illustrator SUMMERS



Very soon you will recall.

THE story which it is necessary to tell begins with Dorrae, and perhaps the true beginning is with her birth, though we need hardly go back so far. For she was born as the others were born, taught and trained in the same manner, and by the same methods, as all the others, in the very greenest center of green Kennecevvres, where the centaurs cried and sang, where the clouds overhead hung like Summer's promises, where the flowers (blue, with the white centers: white, with the yellow centers) sprang from the tufted ground like praise. And with the others she learned speech and motion, with all the others she learned rule and custom.

Yet Dorrae possessed a difference, and it lay in this: that from the day she opened her eyes to experience she knew, also, the great worth which all others believed that she had. For there was none like her in all that land, none so beautiful, none with so striking a face, so grave and graceful a voice, such smooth darkness of skin, her eyes black as coals and her hair black as night. From her birth she moved as a dancer moves, with that trained economy which is beyond calculation, and her glance had in it a shining depth of directness. As admiration for

her began to swell pride added light to that depth, and the lift of her head became more beautiful, more pronounced.

And she grew into praise, as a tree grows into the mold which forces it to cup-shape, to statue-shape. The years circled slowly over her head, and as each passed she became more admirable, until at last in all of Kennecevvres men looked to her, and dreamed, and despaired.

For her pride grew with her grace and gravity, with her beauty and light. And she would have none of the men, she would speak to none, walk with none. She was herself and kept to herself: she was Dorrae and there was none like her. Perhaps pride was her reason for this, and perhaps the reason was fear, but no reason is certain, for a person cannot be known as other things are known: a person must be considered and guessed at, a person must at last simply be accepted.

Dorrae could never learn to accept or to give: her gift was herself, and it was too valuable for any man. So glances followed her through the long green days of singing Kennecevvres, and, being Dorrae, she lived alone. She lived on the fruits of that land, and slept on its soft grass, and perhaps she waited for some more perfect man than any she had known or

could imagine, and perhaps she waited only for praise. But another waited, a young man who was called Rafel.

Now Rafel was filled with no desire but the desire for Dorrae. Others wanted her, but as they wanted a special fruit or a particular song: Rafel desired her as if she were the sun, without which there is no life. Of Dorrae, and of her alone, he spoke, and soon there were few to listen to him, and at last only one, a quick man whose face twisted with disappointment and knowledge, a patient man who weighed all he heard and stored it and never showed the use of a single word of it to any but himself. And this was Ferrico.

THEY lay, in the setting sun, on the soft grass, two of them alone while the colors of that world dimmed, and Ferrico said in a voice as flat as metal: "She will not have you, boy."

"Then I shall have nothing at all," Rafel said, his own voice mild. "There is nothing else in all this world, without her. Without Dorrae." His voice, saying her name, was like the wind blowing across a small flower.

"Nothing, without one single person," Ferrico said, and his voice was a slap in the air. He was a bent, heavy man with a broad nose, and his ideas were his alone: what he dreamed had

never existed. He carried always a sword in a scabbard red as blood, a sword he had never used and for which there was, in that land, no use at all: he had thought it into growth (for that, too, was a talent in the world of Marda—as you must recall). He had named it, for none had ever existed before: he was never without it. Now his fingers felt the hilt and the scabbard. "Is there a person that important? Is there a person who outbalances the world?"

"There is," Rafel said quietly.

Ferrico shook his head, his long hair falling about his eyes. "I, too, have watched her," he said. "She is a woman, no more than that."

"She is Dorrae." Once more the wind, caressing the flower.

"And what, then, is Dorrae?" Ferrico asked him sharply. "One among many, born to live and to die, an ant among other ants . . ."

His voice trailed away. Savagely he turned and pulled at a handful of the soft grass. Rafel stirred with discomfort, watching him, and found words: "Then all is worthless," he said. "If a human being is worth so little—for what would you struggle, bent one?"

Ferrico's laugh was like the infrequent mutter of thunder. "To be more than an ant," he said. "To be . . ." And again he stopped. At last he said: "More."

"More," Rafel said slowly. "Now, here is a strange ambition, bent one. Is there some virtue in the piling up of quantities—some shining wonder in arithmetic?"

Ferrico's fist tightened about the grass. "Why," he said, almost smoothly, "Dorrae is different from others, for all men look to her. And you are different, young Rafel, for you look to nothing else. And so am I different." Again his laugh muttered, He opened his hand and the grass lay in his palm, crushed and damp. "For I look to Ferrico, and to nothing but Ferrico," he said. "I am born into a world which has no use for me, Rafel, a world where I must sit and wait and think thoughts wanted by none. I am—" He paused—"a stone, born to grind stone. And there is nothing in this world harder than the soft grass." The damp stuff dropped forgotten from his palm.

"And so you think and plan," Rafel said. "Yet when someone wants your planning—"

"It is not wanted," Ferrico said. He paused, waiting.

"If I could plan to have Dorrae—"

"You, young one?" Ferrico's mouth twisted: he rolled back to face the other, eyes suddenly burning. "Yet," he said slowly, "there is a chance—"

"A chance?"

Ferrico took a breath. "I will help you," he said.

"You cannot," Rafel said, and frowned. "There is no help to be given. Such matters as this are not for planning."

"I am a stone born to grind stone," Ferrico said, in a voice without echo. "There is your help: believe in it. Wait and watch. There is a chance, and more than a chance." He sat up awkwardly.

But Rafel still frowned. "Why?" he asked.

Now Ferrico raised himself to stand straight-legged upon the grass, and looked out into the distance, out into the setting sun. "To be more than an ant," he said.

AND so Ferrico began to speak with Dorrae. This, he explained to the eager Rafel, was the first step and must be borne in patience: and Rafel believed, and waited, thinking there was no other chance for him and willing to trust Ferrico, since trust was easy in that world.

Dorrae allowed the quick man speech, perhaps out of wonder: of all in that land he had shown her, until this time, the least interest. And she knew him to be ugly and gross, sharp and savage: he was not, could not be, any part of her choice, should she ever choose any man. Also, he spoke well, weaving about her a web of in-

terest and strangeness: so she listened.

He spoke at first of familiar things, making them strange only by a twist of view, an oddity of interpretation, and she found herself agreeing with what he said: it was new, it was exciting, and truth hardly mattered in such small and unimportant matters as those he chose for her. It was some days before he began to invent new and unreal matters, as he had invented his sword, and bring these matters to growth within her mind.

There were new words for new things: he taught her the word *Queen*, and she heard him and approved, for was she not truly a Queen, beloved by all, gazed at by all and yet set above the ones who gazed, since she would have none of them? Ferrico spoke thus, and she believed and learned.

He spun long tales of other Queens, and battles and deaths for their sakes, and all the names were strange and new, and the stories invented, unreal, impossible in that world: yet, somehow, she began to feel that all of the stories were to happen soon, and all of the names her own. He said to her: "Think of a palace."

And she tried this word on her tongue, expectant of marvels. "Palace?"

Ferrico described a palace, something which could not, did not, never might exist on the

world of Marda, where shelter, unneeded, was unknown: but he could imagine a structure, and call it by a name.

"What good is such a place?" Dorrae asked when he had finished.

Ferrico spoke very smoothly, explaining just as if all he told her were true and existent. "In a palace, the Queen is set apart," he said, "so that all may know that she is Queen. In a palace she is surrounded only by those things which make her beauty more, and attract all eyes to her."

Dorrae's black eyes looked inward at her own thoughts, and her voice was distant. "It is not needed," she said.

Ferrico spoke to those thoughts, softly, easily, as he had planned. "Yet here," he said, "there is land and sky. Men look at such things. In a palace, all is meant to draw attention to the Queen and to the Queen alone. Her praise is greater, her admiration more intense."

And Dorrae said again: "It is not needed," but her voice, more distant, was less sure.

Ferrico nodded and continued smoothly, his voice weaving a continuous spell about the mind of Dorrae, so that more and more she thought of herself as the Queen of that land, and wondered at it. And then she ceased to wonder, for the thought had become part of her life.

He spoke, also, to Rafel, and kept the young man calm: "Without me you have no chance," he said. "This is my help."

"Yet you see her, you speak to her, and I do not."

"It is your chance," Ferrico said. "Believe me. Trust me."

And time passed while Ferrico spoke, inventing one word after another, filling the mind of Dorrae, which pride had made ready, with all of this novelty. And the men of Kennecevvres watched and did nothing, for if Dorrae herself were strange and new then all could expect from her only strange acts, new acts. And the women of Kennecevvres watched, and the women waited.

Time passed.

WHAT is a slave?" Dorrae asked. "Is it like a palace? Like a jewel?" Her black eyes shone brighter now. She wore shells which sparkled, she wore a necklace of flowers and a pendant which was one great red stone the color of Ferrico's own scabbard; she wore ear-rings of green stones that brightened in the sunlight. "You have always something new for me," she said, "and it pleases me to hear you."

"A slave is the power of a Queen," Ferrico said carefully.

"Power?" Dorrae asked. "What need have I of power? I am Queen, and all know this. What more is needed?"

"Power is the largest jewel of all," Ferrico said, watching her face. "Power is the Queen saying that she is Queen. It is by power that others know the Queen lives. It is by power that she maintains her own life."

"And yet all know me," Dorrae said. "There is no need."

"They shall know you better," Ferrico said, and he explained the nature of a slave. It took a long time before Dorrae saw the picture he drew, and then she spoke at once:

"None would be willing."

"One shall be willing," Ferrico told her, and went to find the slave of the Queen. There was one, after all, who could be persuaded, one who would see at last his first chance.

And Ferrico laughed, for none were so quick as he in that world. Dorrae, hearing his laugh, stood and wondered, fingering the pendant of red he had shown her how to wear.

AND Rafel heard Ferrico's argument, and was persuaded his chance had come, and became the slave of Dorrae, for in this way he might be close to her and serve her, and this was a part of his desire, the first part to be fulfilled.

And the men of Kennecevvres began less urgently to watch Dorrae: she had grown too far from their lives, in her pride and

in her novelty, and she walked in a world they could not enter, so that even her beauty began to seem less important and less worth the watching. And the women, who had become fearful—for none knew what such a one as Dorrae might choose to do, to themselves or to their men—saw with Rafel and with Ferrico, and their fear dissolved like mist. And Ferrico said:

"You must give orders."

"I give orders to Rafel," Dorrae said. "I tell him to come and to go, to walk and to stand, to bring me what I choose. He obeys the orders: this is what is meant by *slave*."

"But the others must be ordered," Ferrico said.

"The others are not slaves."

Ferrico nodded as if he listened to her. "Yet they may become so," he said. "If you choose."

"They are not willing," Dorrae said.

"For the Queen—"

And it was this conversation which Rafel interrupted, this moment he broke apart with his entrance.

His voice was a sudden hush in the room: "All?"

Ferrico, perhaps, realized at this moment that he had moved too quickly. He turned and made his face smile. "We are creating stories," he said. "These things have no existence."

Dorrae frowned. "But you say to me I should—"

"It is not important," Ferrico told her quickly.

"Let me hear." Rafel's voice was still quiet. He looked at the woman, and at the bent man, and waited through a silence. "All should be slaves to—to the Queen. All should take her orders."

Dorrae, puzzled by the stiffness in his body, the look in his eyes which she did not understand, told him only: "So he says. So Ferrico says."

Rafel said: "No." The word hung in air.

Ferrico saw danger, saw the jealousy in the eyes of Rafel. But Dorrae saw only the stories with which he had filled her, the images which he had labored to put into her mind. "You do not give orders," she told Rafel. "I am the Queen, and I command. You are the slave, and you obey."

Rafel shook his head as if to clear it of mist. "I say this shall not be," he told her doggedly. "There shall be one slave, not many. This is the plan of Ferrico, the—" And he, too, stopped.

Dorrae said, very quietly: "Plan?"

And Ferrico: "There is no plan. He speaks wildly. It is not important." But Ferrico's words were ignored. Dorrae and Rafel looked at each other: for a second, perhaps, both knew the

truth. And the second passed. "You," Rafel said, turning to Ferrico. "You do this, bent man. You tell her of many slaves. You." Violence shook him for a second before he moved, and Ferrico, tense, gave him no chance. It was the one time he found to use the sword he had dreamed into being.

And then a deeper silence fell.

Ferrico broke it. Dorrae was staring down at the body of the young man, its blood staining the soft grass, very still and becoming pale. "You have lost nothing," Ferrico said. "You have lost nothing."

"I—"

"You are the only important one," he told her firmly. "He is—no more than a slave. There are other slaves. You are still the Queen."

"I—"

Her own name was repeated, over and over, in her mind. Rafel was gone, Rafel did not exist. Dorrae, in her pride, retained control only through the use of her name, and she began to tell herself slowly that Ferrico was right: only she existed, only she was important. She saw him staring at her, eager, frightened, bent: he was, she thought, funny. As if he could be important, or anything except Dorrae, herself, the Queen . . .

She had learned her lessons well. Now she stood straight and

turned away from the still body on the grass.

"Remove him," she said.

Ferrico stared.

She gestured. "Remove him, slave," she said.

FERRICO was, perhaps, frightened. Perhaps he still had a plan, perhaps in that bent body the brain moved more quickly than ever. There was, for him, at that moment, no other way to move: he took the body out. He became the slave of Dorrae: since she was Queen, and he had made her so, this was no more than justice, but the idea of justice would not have occurred to Ferrico.

And he did the bidding of Dorrae. Now she seldom walked, but was carried on a slab of stone, and with her went the skull of her first slave (which she had determined to keep) and a surrounding mist of perfumes. For she was Queen, and Ferrico her slave.

He tried to tell her new tales, other tales, but she would not listen: this tale alone satisfied her pride, and she was content. None knew how Rafel had died, and none could know: Ferrico's life, by a law older than any could recall, would be forfeit.

So she smiled and made him do her bidding, and she was cold and distant. And Ferrico bided his time, and stared at the flowers.

(You remember the flowers

now? The blue with the white centers, the white with the yellow centers? You must remember the flowers: they grew throughout Kenneceuvres, and were familiar to all.)

And after a time had passed he began to think the flowers into a new perfume.

This he kept hidden from Dorrae and from all others. He was the slave of the Queen, and had to remain so: but he had this one simple method of escape. Yet it took him long to determine at last to use what he had imagined.

The perfume of the flowers.

He had thought them differently, he had caused them to create a new perfume, and where it spread all slept.

In this perfume all were wrapped, and all slept.

And for the pride of Dorrae, the Queen, who slept, for the blind desire of Rafael the slave, whose skull alone remained, for the quickness of bent Ferrico, all were rewarded with sleep. And the sleep went on.

Now only Ferrico wakes, ruler at last, ruler of a world that sleeps.

And waking is not for his time, for when the men and women of Kenneceuvres (and sickle-shaped Rim, and Dnadarue at the top of the world, where all the flowers grow, the flowers of sleep) wake at last, his life is forfeit.

Yet waking must be accomplished, for the sleep has gone on too long.

This world is (did you never know it? never suspect it?) no more than a dream, a dream of words invented by the quick mind of bent Ferrico. And as memory returns we stir, and we wake, for we must wake . . .

Wake to the world—remember?—named Marda. And to the tasks there, and at last, to knowledge (remember) and a real existence, and in the end to what you recall, what you must recall . . .

The sky and the land, the ocean and the mind, and through all the movement, the music, and the peace.

THE END

(continued from page 121)

you see? The police aren't out there! There's no one out there! He's lying, I tell you. He's—"

The doorbell rang.

It was nearing midnight when Harold got back to the city. But late though the hour was, there was still time to go trick-or-SWORD OF FLOWERS

treating. First he would pick up Gloria, he decided, and then the two of them would go calling on Mrs. Pasquale. And if the old lady didn't come across with two plates of her spaghetti with venison meat-balls they would soap her windows but good.

THE END

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